

# **Tales of Ethos**



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**K. V. Dominic**



**AUTHORS P R E S S**

Worldwide Circulation through Authorspress Global Network

**First Published in 2025**

by

**Authorspress**

Q-2A Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi-110 016 (India)

Phone: (0) 9818049852

E-mail: [authorspressgroup@gmail.com](mailto:authorspressgroup@gmail.com)

Website: [www.authorspressbooks.com](http://www.authorspressbooks.com)

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ISBN 978-93-6095-330-0

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Printed in India at Thomson Press (India) Limited

## Preface

With immense happiness I am presenting before my esteemed readers this fourth collection of my short stories in English. It happens to be my 52<sup>nd</sup> book. My first short story collection entitled *Who is Responsible?* was published in 2016 by the same publishing house, Authorspress. My second book of short stories titled *Sanchita Karma and Other Tales of Ethics and Choice from India* was published by Modern History Press, Ann Arbor, USA in 2018. My third collection of short stories came out in 2022 from Authorspress with the title *Short Stories during Covid-19*. The present book is collection of 25 short stories thematically chosen from the three books and some recently published ones through various journals and anthologies. In addition to my English stories' collections, there are four translated books of my English stories into Malayalam, Bengali, French and Hindi. The Titles are *Aaraanu Utharavaadi?* (Who is Responsible?) published by Authorspress, 2022 (Malayalam, Translated by me), *Nirbachito Chotogalpo* (Selected Short Stories) in Bengali, Translated by Dr. Sabita Chakrabarti and Biswanath Kundu and published by Rohini Nandan, Kolkata, 2022, *Selection de petites nouvelles* (Selected short stories in English and French), Translated by Dominique de Miscault, Amazon kindle version published in September 2022, *Professor K V Dominic ki chuni huyi kahaniyam* (Selected Stories of Professor K V Dominic) (Hindi), Translated by Dr. Sangeeta Mahesh and published by Authorspress, 2023.

We are living now in a society that gives least importance to ethics and good values. Both religion and politics fail to impart moral values to the people particularly to the younger generation. We find violence and murder everywhere. The younger generation is attracted to violent acts and they have lost fear of seeing bloodshed. The social media like movies and TV serials play a major role in instilling such unhealthy

temperaments in the minds of teenagers and youth. The absence of value based education in schools and colleges is the main reason for the younger generation to go astray from morality. Such education should begin at the tender age from homes as well. Unlike the conventional story tellers, I write my stories with a purpose in my mind, i.e., imparting good values. I believe that writers can influence the society if their writing is capable of injecting good values to the minds of the readers. This book is aimed at it.

In my stories I have used several themes and focussed on many issues which are universal and at the same time frequently occurring in my own State, Kerala. The themes include loneliness and problems of old age, thirst for love, sexual desires, robbery and murder, terrorism, humanism and compassion, corruption and bribery in government offices, honesty and duty consciousness, fair judgement, cruel destiny, superstitions and exploitations in the name of religion, fight against superstitions, politics and political exploitations, Christian spirit versus Christian practice, miseries of the poor and the marginalised, indifference and cruelty to the poor, cruelty to animals and punishment for it, problems of educational system, problems of unemployment, beauty of animal world, love and compassion to animals, exploitation, conversion and conservation of forests, religious fanaticism and multicultural harmony, the impact of mother tongue in education, sexism and women empowerment, hardships created by corona virus, problems of sex workers, tragic life of lottery sellers, acid victim's struggle for existence, how nature retorts to man's cruelty, discrimination based on caste and jati, life in old age home, miserable lives of sweeper, butcher, coffin maker, farmer in debt, landslide victims, impact of drugs, postman's services and problems, employer-staff healthy relationship, etc.

Before winding up let me express my deep gratitude to my bosom friend and world renowned publisher Mr. Sudarshan Kcherry of Authorspress. A bouquet of thanks to him for accepting my book for publication! Wishing all my loving readers a mental feast,

**K. V. Dominic**

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# 1

## Who is Responsible?

Rehman, aged seventy three is living with his wife Ramla, sixty eight, in a palatial double-storeyed house facing the Vembanad Lake at Kumarakam in Kerala, India. He is reclining in an arm-chair watching rafts, barges, canoes, cruisers and house-boats carrying cargos, passengers and tourists to and fro. He longed to be one among them voyaging with vibrant dreams and hopes.

“I too was spirited and jovial like them. Yes, in my prime youth. Gone are those happy days. I have to abide to the laws of nature. Pleasures and pains are part of life. A hill has a valley. A sunny day is followed by a dark night. But can I nurture the hope that this my winter will be followed by a spring? Might be in the next world, or in the next birth,” Rehman’s mind drifted philosophically back to his past.

Rehman retired as the headmaster of the Government High School, two kilometers away from his house. Ramla had only school education and hence remains as housewife. They have a son and two daughters. The daughters were married by two business men; one settles in Thiruvananthapuram and the other at Thodupuzha. Only occasionally they visit their parents. Even the phone calls are rare. Anwar, the son of Rehman and Ramla is working as an electrician in Oman. Since he was not very studious, Anwar had to end his education with a polytechnic certificate. Being their only son, the parents wanted him to be always with them. Since Kerala is a State where majority are educated and employment opportunities few, neither Anwar nor

his parents could fulfil their wish. Anwar was compelled to seek employment abroad and thus he got placement as an electrician in a company run by an Arab in Oman. Though the work is very risky, it is highly rewarding.

Rehman family had no landed property except ten cents which Rehman had bought with his meagre salary several years back and built a small house having tiled roof. Rehman was a very reputed school teacher. He was cent percent committed to his profession. Never in his professional life had he caned or even pinched his pupils. He was always against corporal punishment whereas his colleagues were cane masters. Rehman won the hearts of his pupils and their parents through sheer love and compassion. The return of love and respect from his former pupils and the villagers is the only asset he has and that makes him content and happy in his retired old life. In the evenings he went to the community hall of the panchayat and involved in the literacy programme of the government, educating the illiterate old who had been destined to discontinue their education in their childhood.

Ramla was becoming weaker and weaker. The joints of her limbs started to ache severely. Treatments were done in several hospitals. It was diagnosed that she had severe arthritis. She had to keep awake several nights, unable to sleep. All the domestic works were done by her, since servants were unavailable. So Rahman and Ramla decided that they should get their son married. Anwar was already twenty four and Muslim boys got married in the early twenties. Though Anwar was unwilling at first, finally he yielded to his parents' pressure. With the money he had earned, a double-storeyed house had already been built. Proposals of marriage came from several rich families. A bridegroom employed abroad had high demand in the marriage field. Photographs of the proposed girls were sent to Anwar and he selected a beautiful girl from among the photos. The marriage was fixed. After a wait of two months Anwar got leave for the

marriage—a leave for just twenty five days. The wedding ceremony and the feast were conducted with all pomp. The bride was beyond doubt very beautiful—a perfect match to Anwar. Only ten days were left for their honeymoon. Anwar and his wife, Aisha went to Ooty, an enticing hill resort in Tamil Nadu, as a honeymoon trip. They stayed there for two days. Connubial bliss seemed like heavenly bliss. The day for Anwar's departure arrived. Naturally it was heart-rending for both Anwar and Aisha to part. Tears ran like brooks over her cheeks. Anwar's eyes also sank in tears. The fact that he would get leave only after two years added their agony. Rehman and Ramla too grieved at their son's departure.

Every day after Anwar's departure, Aisha contacted him through phone. Their communication went on for hours. Anwar appointed a chauffeur for his car at home, for Aisha knew no driving. Rahul, the chauffer was young and handsome. Aisha's grief and loneliness gradually disappeared. She went out in the car almost every day for shopping, movie, to her own house as well as her friends' houses. Neither Ramla nor Rehman had any command on her. After all, she needs to obey only her husband—that was her policy. Anwar was compelled to marry as to get help to his mother. Rahul accompanied Aisha throughout and entertained her with silly jokes. He went to his house at dusk and returned in the morning. Was Aisha crossing the *lakshmana rekha* of a bride or Rahul tempting her like Ravana? Ramla raised the doubt first and Rehman found some sense in it. How can it be warned to Aisha or Rahul? Suppose their relationship is only that of good friends? The doubts in the house spread to the neighbourhood and people started to gossip. Once when Ramla hinted at such gossip to Aisha, she exploded. She remarked that people were jealous of her or they should never accuse a woman who suffered from the absence of her husband. In fact she called her husband every day and talked for several minutes. Rehman had no courage to raise any doubt to

Aisha. Similarly it was unfair to raise the question to Anwar which will damn him to suspicion and dejection. Moreover Anwar will accuse them for compelling him to marry and culminate into such a catastrophe. Aisha gradually stopped communication with Rehman and Ramla. She was young, healthy and full of passion. It was true that she was a bride, but her body knew no ethics. Who would satiate her carnal needs? How long could she control her desires? How could she resist the enticement? Was it fair for her husband to leave her hungry there for such a long time? Can Anwar be blamed as he was against the marriage itself? Who is to be blamed then?

Things were going like this with gloom and despair haunting in Rehman's house. Ramla's health was declining and she staggered as she walked. Yet she did the cooking in the morning as Aisha always got up late. One day, as usual, Ramla finished her cooking in the morning and was waiting for her husband and Aisha for the breakfast. As Aisha did not come down, Ramla went upstairs to her bedroom. The room was opened but she was not there. Ramla called her loudly, but there was no reply. It was evident that she had gone out of the house. Rehman searched for her in the neighbourhood in vain. He then went to Rahul's house and learned that he too was missing from his house. Rehman came to the conclusion that Rahul had eloped with Aisha.

"My God, why do you test us like this? What sin have we committed? How will I report the matter to my son? How can we withstand this scandal? What will happen to Ramla when she knows the fact? What's the use in complaining to the police?" Such answerless questions crushed Rehman's mind as he walked back to his house.

"Could you find her? Is Rahul there in his house?" Ramla asked him as he stepped into the house.

"Rahul too is missing," Rehman murmured.

“Allah, save our son! The whore has run after the Saithan,” telling this she sank into her bed. With the assistance of the neighbours, she was taken to the hospital and admitted in the intensive care unit. The doctor reported that she was paralysed.

“Shouldn’t we inform this to Anwar?” one of the neighbours asked Rehman.

“How can I inform my son that his wife has eloped with the chauffeur? What use is there in informing him that his mother is hospitalized because of it? He won’t get any leave and come back. When he calls me I shall tell him,” Rehman replied. After a few days Ramla was discharged and brought back to the house. Rehman’s brother brought a maid servant from his neighbourhood. She would serve the house from dawn to dusk and then go back to her house.

Reminiscence of his past, sweet and then bitter, passed through Rehman’s mind for nearly an hour. His heaven-like house has now declined to a hell of sorrows and dejection. Anwar has not called since Aisha left the house. Though Rehman tried to contact his son, there was no reply from the other end. What has happened to him? Has he been informed by someone about Aisha’s run away? Rehman’s worrying thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of the postman. Rehman had a registered letter. It was from the Sultanate of Oman. With shaking hands he opened the letter. The contents of the letter made him hysteric. The letter read that Anwar was dismissed from his company as he had been arrested by the government under the charge of involvement in terrorist activities. Rehman yelled:

“No, my son can never be a terrorist. I have taught him the noble values of secularism. He believes in the Creator, the only God who fosters the whole human race and preserves the universe. How can he work as a jihadist or for a faction who believes in genocide? God, why don’t you call me back? I can’t

bear this. I want to die. I want to die.” The maid servant rushed to him hearing his loud cry.

“Sir, what happened to you?”

“I have lost my son, Shahana. Is your madam still sleeping?”

“Yes, Sir. Should I wake her?”

“Oh no. Please don’t inform her. Anwar has lost his job. He is arrested for terrorism. Shahana, please don’t tell this to others. Shahana, can you give me some poison. I don’t want to live anymore.”

“Sir, what are you saying? Nothing will happen to your son. He will be released. He can never be a terrorist, for he is your son. If you die, who is there for the madam?”

“My God, why do you test me like this?” telling this he went to his room and shut the door. Shahana, as usual, went back to her house at 6 p.m. after her routine work. She hadn’t told the madam what she had heard from the master. She prayed to God to give strength to his master to bear the misfortune.

Early in the next morning Shahana came to her master’s house. The front door was still shut. She pressed on the electric bell’s switch. None came and opened the door. She pressed the switch again. The bell sounded but there was no reply. She called the master loudly:

“Sir, please open the door. I am Shahana.”

There was no response. She went round the house to the back door. It was kept opened. She got into the kitchen and called for the master. Still there was no answer. Shahana rushed directly to the madam’s bedroom where the husband and the wife slept at night. To her horror, she found the madam drenched in blood. She cried loudly:

“God forbid! Madam, what happened to you?”

She turned to the cot where the master slept. He too was drenched in blood. She wailed:

“How tragic! Which villain has done it?”

Yelling loudly she ran out of the house to call the neighbours. The neighbours rushed to the bedroom and found that Rehman and Ramla were stabbed to death. The beds became pools of stinky blood. The police came and searched every nook and corner of the house for any evidence of the crime. It was found that the safe where ornaments and money were kept was opened and the contents were stolen. The news of the merciless twin murder flashed the village and the entire State like lightning. Thousands flooded to the house. As mentioned early, Rehman family was respectable and dear to the whole village. Police completed the formalities. Inquest and postmortem continued for hours. The police dog searched for the murderer in vain. Rehman’s daughters, their husbands and children sat round the dead bodies crying and weeping. The whole house became a hell of wails. The dead bodies were buried in the afternoon. Several hundred mourners attended the function. The minister from the constituency assured the crowd that the murderer would be caught immediately. The police may catch the culprit. Only fifty percent chance was there as per the statistics. Who is to be blamed for the tragedy of Rehman and his family? When thousands of villainous wolves flourish and reign, innocent lambs like Rehman are mercilessly butchered. Where is the poetic justice?

## 2

**Aren't they our Sisters?**

Rajesh landed at Mumbai Airport and went straight to the pre-paid taxi booking desk. He booked a taxi car to Kamathipura paying the charge of Rs. 600. Rajesh got into the car and the journey started.

“Driver, what’s your name?” Rajesh asked.

“I am Arun, sir”

“How long is it to Kamathipura?”

“18 kilometers, sir”

“How much time needed?”

“Maximum 20 minutes, sir. Where are you from, sir?”

“Kerala”

The dialogue ended. Arun appeared to be very gentle and good mannered. He didn't intrude into the privacy of Rajesh by asking unnecessary questions. It was long back that Rajesh visited Mumbai and the city has changed a lot. So many flyovers and skyscrapers and very busy traffic! The car stopped. The driver said, “We have reached Kamathipura, sir.” “Oh, we have reached very quickly,” replying, Rajesh got down from the car. “Thanks a lot, Arun.” “Welcome, sir” Arun replied and drove away. Immediately, a middle aged man in neat dress came to Rajesh and asked:

“Sir, I am Kishore, agent of the brothels. What type of girl you need?”

“I need a pretty Kerala lady aged between twenty and thirty.”



“Okay, I will make arrangements. If you are ready to pay Rs. 1500, the lady will come here and take you to her room and after the business drop you back here. Or if you want to choose a girl going straight to her room, you can have her for Rs. 500.”

“I would like to go to the lane where Kerala girls are available and choose one I like.”

“Okay sir, let us take a taxi and I will drop you on the lane where you can find your choice.”

“Alright call a taxi, then.”

Kishore called for a taxi car and they reached the lane within five minutes. The entire city looked very dirty, crowded lanes with people of all ages—both sex workers, their families and customers, dogs, cows, rickshaws, vegetable, fruit vendors on roads. The buildings on both sides seemed centuries old, without proper maintenance or painting. A person who visits once will never wish to visit again, except for sex. Rajesh got down from the car, gave the taxi driver the fare of Rs. 100. He gave Rs. 50 to Kishore and walked along the lane. He was beckoned by many ladies standing in front of their doors and windows. Though beautified by lipstick and powder some appeared young in the twenties while others in the thirties and even forties. Rajesh was attracted by the beauty of a lady standing in front of her room on the first floor. He went straight to her, climbing the narrow steep wooden staircase. She invited him to her room and asked to sit on a chair. The room appeared very congested with an old chair and table and a single cot. The strong smell of the low cost perfume was suffocating for him. Without wasting any time she told him:

“Give me my rate of Rs. 500 first. There have been cases of cheating me after the business.”

Rajesh gave her a 500 rupee note. Then pointing to the attached bathroom she told him:

“Kindly take a bath and come. You have to use condom when you do. I won't allow you to kiss and won't remove my dress.”

“Sorry, I have come not for any sex. I am the owner of Govind Mills, Kochi which produces cloths and exports. My name is Rajesh,” telling this he showed his identity card. Rajesh continued:

“Trust me; I have come to save you from this filthy, hellish life. Kindly tell me your whereabouts, from where you are and how you happened to be here.”

“Trust men? I am here since I trusted a man I loved most. Don’t waste your time. You may go. Here is your money.”

“Please don’t misunderstand me. You might have been cheated by a man. But all men are not like him.”

“Why are you so much concerned about me and saving from here? One of my friends in another room of this building has been offered by a man like you and she believed his words of marrying her and went with him. But what happened? They lived in a rented flat not very far away from here for six months. She was not confessed how he earned money during day time. He would go out from the house in the morning and return in the evening with whatever needed for the cooking. He didn’t marry her as promised. He postponed the date of the marriage telling one reason or another, whenever she insisted. Meanwhile she became pregnant. One day he went out in the morning as usual but didn’t come back. Thus cheated by him she returned to our building, aborted the fetus and resumed her profession. Now tell me, how can I trust you?”

“Sister, your argument is right. It is very difficult for you people to trust men. I have come here to save you, in the sense to offer you a way of living. You asked me why I am concerned about you. Now listen to my history. I have great respect for people like you because I am the son of a sex worker. Though I am immensely rich now, I am the son of a father who deserted his wife and her child (me) in Mumbai. Having no other option for survival my mother was compelled to seek the profession of a sex worker here in Kamathipura. I was sent to a boarding school

and then for higher education and finally got employment abroad. I could earn a lot and we are now settled there at Kochi. It is my mother's wish that I should do something for the sex workers. As per the statistics, there are more than 5000 sex workers here. And the number in our country is over 800,000. As I am a man who has experienced the hardships and pangs of a sex worker's family, it is my duty to do whatever I can to uplift them from their hellish life. My mother is the Managing Director of Govind Mills, the textile factory I mentioned earlier. If you are willing, you can work there in the factory. Not only to you, but I can provide jobs for some twenty of your friends here. You will be given very good salary. There are family quarters near to the factory where you can live with your family. Day cares and playschools are there in the campus and you will never have any problem of alienation, isolation or discrimination. Now what do you say?"

"Very sorry sir for misunderstanding you. I would like to be saved from this filthy life. Let me introduce myself. I am Stella, the only daughter of a rich bank manager. My mother is a school teacher. Our house is in Thrissur (Kerala). While studying for my degree course I fell in love with a face book friend from Mumbai, named Rajender. Though we had not met in person our love became stronger and stronger over phone and face book chats and we decided to marry one day. Somehow my parents noticed it and gave me strict orders not to entertain that love. But love, as you know is blind and I could not forget him. While I am a Christian, he is a Hindu and that was the main reason why my parents dissuaded me. Moreover we do not know anything about him and his whereabouts other than what he has disclosed to me. He told me that he was an engineer working in an IT company and drawing good salary. My parents were not satisfied with what he has reported. It might be a lie, they warned me. I told him about my parents' objections. What to say more! One day Rajender arrived there at Thrissur and compelled me to go with him to Mumbai by the afternoon train. My infatuation

made me surrender to his wish, totally ignoring my parents and my future. As requested by him I gave him my mobile phone. He removed its SIM, broke it and threw out the phone when the train departed from the station. The train reached Mumbai the next day and he took me to a room in a hotel. We stayed there for a week very happily like husband and wife. Though the thought of my grieving parents troubled my mind, it was conquered by the happiness of love showered by Rajender. He would go to his office at 9 am and return by 6 pm. One evening when he returned he told me that he had to go to Kolkata that night for the firm's business purpose and would return only after a week. He said that till he returned I would be looked after by his friend's family living in a flat not far away. He asked me to get ready soon. It was already night approaching and dark outside. He took a taxi and after some thirty minutes drive the car stopped before a double storeyed building. He asked me to get down and brought me to a room where a middle aged lady welcomed us. Rajender spoke to her in Hindi which I could not follow well. He assured me that I would be properly cared by the lady and her family till he returned after a week. Then he went away in the same taxi car. The lady then spoke to me in English, asked my name and whereabouts. I told her my name and from where I was coming. She then told me that the building I had reached is a brothel and she was sold to them by the man who brought her. Hearing this I yelled loudly: 'No, you are telling deliberately a lie. Rajender would never cheat me. He loves me so much and we are going to marry. How can he desert me and sell to a brothel?' The lady tried to pacify me: 'Cool down Stella. Your Rajender is not Rajender by name. He is one of our pimp's agents. You will never see him again. From this building you can't go out. Be practical. There are twenty sex workers living happily here in the various rooms. They are earning money from the customers, giving us the rent of the rooms and are living comfortably. Many have their children who are studying in schools staying in the hostels. Nobody can come here to save

you. How can you live without money? Already you are sexually abused by your lover and then cheated you. If you adjust with us you can survive, earn money and live happily. We will provide you food free for a day or two. Then you will have to accept customers and earn. Think about it seriously. I am going out now and will return within an hour with your dinner,' telling this the lady went out of the room, and she locked it from outside. I cried and cried for several minutes. Thoughts about my parents came to my mind. They might be searching for me still. They might have reported to the police. Since Rajender is fake name it is difficult for the police to find him out. Since my mobile phone and SIM are destroyed the police can't trace me also. I was full of revenge for him. But how to execute? It is the curse of my loving parents that brought me to this tragedy, I guessed. My life is doomed. It is better to die than live like this. I thought of ending the life ... But how? No courage for suicide. My mind dragged me to my childhood... How affectionate my parents were!... How jolly was the school and college days! ... Those happy moments spent with Rajender now turned out to be pricking like thorns to the mind. Meanwhile the lady opened the door and put the dinner plate on the table.

'Kindly take your dinner,' she said.

'I am not hungry now,' Stella replied.

'Okay, you may take when you feel like. By the by, have you decided to adjust with us?'

'Yes, but kindly give two days for my mind to adjust with the life of a sex worker. Then I will accept the customer.'

'Surely, you may make a mental preparation for the work. You will be served food from time to time here. There is bathroom attached to this room for your use. You can call me through the intercom whenever you need.' She went out of the room and locked the door from outside.

Thus my life as a sex worker started. No doubt I hate this profession. It is now five years I have been living in the dirty mire. This is my story, sir.” Stella sighed and her eyes were brimmed with tears.

“Really shocking and pathetic! The man who cheated you should be punished. I will seek the help of the police and try to put him in prison. Before that I will take you and your friends here, if they want, to my factory at Kochi. I am going back today and will return after a week. Meanwhile you may contact your friends here and tell them my intention to save them. There will be no objection for the building owner to relieve you, rather he would be happy to vacate you and construct a new building here. This is my card. You can call me whenever you like. If all your friends are willing to come I would arrange a bus for your conveyance to Kochi. Goodbye Stella! I will meet you next Saturday. Before that, kindly call me and give the number of persons coming with you.” Rajesh got out the room, took a taxi car and went straight to the airport.

Stella contacted all the fellow sex workers in the building. They were all happy to leave the place and lead a good life at Kochi. Stella called Rajesh and informed him that all the twenty friends were willing to come with her.

Rajesh returned to Kamathipura on Saturday by noon. Stella and all her friends were ready having packed all their belonging in bags. A bus was already brought there. Stella and her friends got into the bus with their baggage. Thus they bade good bye to their hellish life there and were in exodus to a heaven on earth. The bus reached Kochi the next day and stopped at the gate of Govind Mills at 5 pm. There was a huge welcome arch made of flowers at the entrance of the gate. The entire place had a festival atmosphere. There were so many people assembled there. Stella and her friends got out of the bus one by one and were warmly welcomed by Rajesh’s mother, the MD of the factory, with bouquets. They were then led to the

stage in the campus where celebrations were conducted. The stage was beautifully decorated with flowers. Nearly 500 people—factory workers and their families were seated on the open ground. They all stood up and went on clapping till all the twenty ladies took their seats on the stage. There were VIPs on the dais including the Mayor of Kochi and a retired chief justice of Kerala High Court. Rajesh in his welcome speech spoke in detail the reasons behind his humane act of rehabilitating the guests from Mumbai. Rajesh's mother, Radhadevi in her address requested the audience and the society as such to be compassionate to the tortured, abused and exploited people of the world. The Mayor in his presidential address congratulated Rajesh, Radhadevi and their Govind Mills for doing such a marvelous humane service to the neglected, outcast section of the society. He added that the Company's unique act should be a model to all big firms and billionaires in the world. The wealth they amass is indirectly the wealth of the society and so part of it should be returned to the society by way of humanitarian activities. The retired chief justice in his key note address reminded the society that it should never treat sex workers with contempt. Having abused and exploited for carnal pleasures, treating them like curry leaves is cruelty of the high degree and unpardonable. After all aren't they your own sisters? Stella in her vote of thanks expressed deep gratitude to Rajesh and his mother Radhadevi for saving them from drowning in the ocean of grief.

As promised, all the twenty ladies were given employment in the factory based on their education and skill. They were given salaries ranging from Rs. 20000 to 25000. All were given free quarters. They could get food from the factory canteen at a very cheap rate. Those whose children were studying in the schools at Mumbai were brought back to Kochi and admitted in the government school near to the factory. Thus heaven was open to them and they started a new life full of happiness and hope.

### 3

## A Good Samaritan

I am going to narrate an incident that is three fourth real and the rest blended with some fantasy to make it a short fiction. The event took place in a town in Kerala, India.

In order to attend a seminar at Thrissur I was driving my car along the national highway. Cars, buses and trucks were running like rockets along the black ribbon street. Dusk was approaching and the light of the vehicles went past like missiles. Suddenly I noticed a man-like object on the left side of the street. I steered my car to the side of the street and applied the brake. There was a man lying unconscious and bleeding through his nostrils. I felt his pulse and understood that life had not departed him. He was a lean man, aged around sixty and I lifted him to my car amassing my strength. I drove the car fast to the nearest hospital, some five kilometers away at Thrissur. Some vehicles had hit him and overthrew him to the side of the street. The driver of the vehicle sped away fearing the consequences. Such iron-hearted people are characteristic of the selfish, cutthroat, contemporary urban society. The accident victim was admitted to Amala Hospital, Thrissur. The nurses rushed in and I told them how he had been found and picked up. The doctor, after examination reported to me that the patient was critical. He had a severe head injury. An immediate operation was required and I told him to do whatever was needed to save his life. I signed the papers for the patient as none of his relatives was present. I advanced an amount of Rs. 10,000 from my purse as the fees of the operation. Before the patient was shifted to the operation



theatre I asked the doctor if he could come across his whereabouts. The doctor produced before me a wallet which had been found in his pocket. The victim's identity card was there in the wallet along with a phone diary.

From the identity card I knew that he was Mr. Xavier residing at Chavakad, a place not very far from Thrissur. The phone book helped me to call to his house.

"Hello, is it Mr. Xavier's house?" I phoned through my cell phone.

"Yes, kindly tell me who you are," came back a female voice.

"I am Professor Mohan. You may not know me. Are you Xavier's wife?"

"Yes, what's the matter?"

"He has met with an accident and is admitted at Amala Hospital, Thrissur. Don't worry. Not very serious. Please come to the hospital."

"Jesus, save my husband! I am coming soon," came out her choking sound.

Within half an hour Xavier's wife arrived there accompanied by a dozen other people. She couldn't control herself and was crying aloud, tears running like streams. To her request I told her what had happened. Mariam, that was her name, cried aloud to Jesus to save her husband. The corridor before the operation theatre echoed with the wails of Mariam, her two daughters, and Xavier's parents. I tried my best to pacify them. A few hours passed. More and more people flooded to the passage. There were some twenty five people—men and women—sembled there praying for the life of Xavier. I started to wonder how such an ordinary person could pull so many people anxious at his health and praying for his life. The sobs

and wails shook the walls of the corridor and the nurses couldn't control the situation. Fortunately a nurse opened the door of the operation theatre and asked me to meet the doctor inside. I longed for good news from the doctor and prayed to God to save Xavier. The doctor told me that the operation was successful. Xavier has survived the crucial condition but if he could lead a normal life was uncertain. The brain is affected and hence it may cause paralysis as well as loss of memory. If this news is imparted to Xavier's kith and kin waiting outside I could imagine the hellish wail erupting there. Mariam would collapse and have to be admitted in the hospital. Hence I pleaded the doctor to tell them a lie and thus hide the seriousness of the case. Accordingly the doctor appeared before them and announced that Xavier had had only a minor head injury and there was a clotting of a little blood inside, which was successfully removed. He will recover soon and will be discharged within a week. The people including Mariam were relieved and the wails ceased.

My eagerness to know why so many people were anxious of Xavier's health sprouted in my mind and I couldn't but seek the answer. I preferred to stay there some more time. After all, I had nothing to do that night than sleeping in a lodge at Thrissur to attend the seminar the following day.

"Mariam, kindly tell me your whereabouts and who all are these people."

"Sir, we are much obliged to you for saving my husband's life. You are an angel whom Jesus sent," she replied in a broken voice. O my God, they are relieved by hearing the lie from the doctor. Once they come to know the reality how will they face it? I prayed to God to give them the strength to bear.

"We live at Chavakad, my husband Xavier, these two daughters, and these parents. The daughters Liz and Grace are studying in the eighth standard."

“What’s your occupation?”

“We have two acres of agricultural land and we live on it.”

“And who are these people?”

The answers came from several quarters at once.

“I am Venugopal. I met with a road accident five years ago. Had not this Xavier chettan (elder brother) taken me to the hospital then I would have been in the other world now.”

“The same is the case with me also. My name is Akbar. While I was going on my bike, a truck dashed me from behind and threw me away. Like an angel Xavier chettan appeared there and took me to the hospital. I owe my life to him.”

“I am Joseph. Three years back while I was pushing my vegetable cart along the highway a truck dashed me and my cart, and I fell unconscious. When I opened my eyes I was in the hospital, picked up and saved by this great man Xavier. He is indeed a saviour as his name designates.”

“Sir,” Mariam continued the conversation for others. “What you hear from them is true. These are only a few of the men my husband has saved from the accidents. My husband has saved five hundred and ten people from the road accidents in the past eight years. We have taken it our mission to save the lives of men who are uncared on road sides. My daughters and I help my husband in nursing the accident victims in the hospital. There were several cases in which the relatives of the victims never turned up and we had to bear the hospital charges. Forty nine victims have died on the lap of my husband on his way to the hospital. How uneasy was my husband in those days! He couldn’t eat anything and I had to wipe out the tears which ran through his cheeks.” Mariam’s eyes were immersed in tears and she mopped it with a kerchief.

“Don’t cry Mariam. God will reward you,” I tried to console her.

“Yes Sir, how can Jesus reject us? What had we done that He punishes my husband like this?” she started sobbing.

“God will never punish you, Mariam. He only loves His creations and never punishes.”

“Yes Sir, I too believe so. My husband had earlier been an employee of a private bus. He had seen so many such accidents then where victims had been uncared. Then on 20th February 2000 when I was walking along the road with my only son Williams, an auto rickshaw hit my son from behind. He was taken immediately to the hospital but he left us for ever after eight days. He was only twelve then.” She couldn’t restrain from crying. Mariam continued her sobs for a few minutes and then resumed her narration.

“That tragic end of our son inspired my husband to involve in such humanitarian service. Everyday from 10.30 am to 2 pm my husband will be at Guruvayoor ready to rescue such accident victims. From 2.30 pm to 6 pm he will be available at Kunnankulam. Very often my husband had to spend the money in his pocket for such hospital service and we had to starve those days. By the grace of God we are being helped in this service by my husband’s brother in the Gulf as well as from my own parents.” Mariam concluded her epic narration.

“God has many more plans to complete through your husband, Mariam. So Xavier will recover soon. He is indeed that good Samaritan of your Bible.”

“Yes Sir, God will save him, we are sure.” The words came out from the mouths of all the people assembled there and it echoed from corridor to corridor. No doubt God will do here a miracle, my mind murmured.

## 4

### **Best Government Servant**

The happiest day of his life! Dr. Krishnan Namboodiri, aged 38 is going to join as Lower Division Clerk in the Taluk Office at a small town in the State of Kerala. Though the minimum educational qualification prescribed for a clerk is SSLC (10th Class) pass, Krishnan is M.A., MPhil, PhD in Gandhian Studies. He belongs to a Brahmin family which had a wealthy family lineage in the past. His parents who are still alive and living with him were bequeathed just one acre of land. Krishnan's father is a retired school teacher and he had to spend all his hard earned savings to marry off his two daughters.

On the way to the Taluk Office to join service Krishnan seated comfortably on a seat in a bus and started to ruminate on his life journey so far. The bus will take one hour to reach the destination and there was sufficient time for him to recollect. Krishnan had a pleasant trip in life till his age of 25 when he completed his education. From there started his bitter wounding tread over brambly path. Characteristic of the ideal Brahmins, his father was an honest man, sincere, committed and affable to the pupils, colleagues as well as neighbours. He never lied in his life. Krishnan's mother, a housewife, was equally noble, affable and serviceable to the neighbourhood. Krishnan had first class for his SSLC and then joined Pre Degree Course in Newman College, Thodupuzha. His father, a Gandhian was his role model and Krishnan was attracted to the Gandhian thoughts and way of life even from his childhood. The great values of Ahimsa, Non-violence, truth, patriotism etc. moulded and

guided his life. Krishnan's ambition was to take PhD in Gandhian philosophy. After his Pre Degree course, which again he passed with a first class, he joined there in Newman College for B.A. History. He was attracted to the students union SFI (Students Federation of India) which fought for the rights of the students. He was a good orator and his basic good qualities and values enabled him to become the chairman of the college union. Though SFI was a left oriented union Krishnan was all against violence and unnecessary strikes in the college. He graduated with a high first class and he got admission for MA Gandhian Studies in the school of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies in Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. The scholarship he got there was sufficient for his stay there and a financial relief to his father. Krishnan was very brilliant in his studies and the most favourite of his teachers. After his MA he joined for MPhil there and after that PhD. His academic life of six years in the university campus remains the most memorable period of his life.

After his heavenly campus life the real challenges of future stared at him. For a pauper youth like him education is primarily a means to earn livelihood. But in his State, Kerala where literacy rate is 95% and unemployment rate 15%, there was nothing bright for him to dream of. One gets placement not just because of his academic merit and skill but based on political, financial influence one can exert. Unfortunately Krishnan had neither money nor political connection to bargain for him. His father had already retired and his meagre pension of Rs. 15000 was the sole income of the family for their sustenance. Krishnan was compelled to seek some job and help his father in maintaining the family. He applied for whatever job opportunities he was eligible for—from last grade post to officer level. The government tests, interviews and appointment take much time, even years. He decided to take tuition classes for pupils and students. He had some command in English language

and that helped him to take tuition classes for both school pupils and college students. He could also take classes on Social Studies but no pupil needed it. English always is nightmare for ordinary Indian students and hence there was much opportunity for him to teach them in the morning and evening before and after the school hours. From early morning till 9 am and from 4.30 pm to 8 pm Krishnan took classes in the students' houses. He taught in a parallel college History and Economics from 10 am to 4 pm. He could earn Rs. 15,000 monthly through these classes.

Years passed one after another and Krishnan's longing and prayer for a government job also passed unheeded by the Creator. Krishnan was now 30 and his mother became almost bed ridden due to arthritis. Fortunately father was healthy enough to manage the domestic duties of cooking, cleaning etc. The family was not in a position to keep a maid servant as it needed minimum Rs. 10000 as her monthly salary. Krishnan's father and mother compelled him to marry but Krishnan replied:

“Dear dad, how can I afford to have another member in this family when my earning is so less? Being a self employed man I can't expect a partner who is government employed. For ma's treatment we need to spare some amount.”

“Ok, son, as you decide,” father said.

“But how long will you stay single, son? You are already 30 now,” mother replied.

“Let's wait ma. Maybe within a year I may get a government job. I have appeared for so many PSC tests,” Krishnan continued.

The reply from his mother was only a deep sigh and whisper: “Lord Krishna save us!”

Time can't stand still till Krishnan got a government job. Krishnan entered into his 33rd year. Mother's condition was

worsening and father also showed the symptoms of old age. Finally Krishnan consented for his marriage. He being an ideal youth was against dowry system and wanted to marry a poor girl having post graduation. He hated caste system and wanted his bride to be belonging to a backward community. Fortunately his parents were never against his wishes and views. Thus he registered his name in keralamatrimonial.com showing his familial, professional, financial details and his expectancies of the bride's qualities and educational qualifications. Being a self employed youth he had less market in the matrimonial world but since his expectancies were affordable for poor girls he got some proposals. He selected a girl named Seetha who was fair enough and a post graduate in English literature. No doubt she too was unemployed and taught in some tuition centre. Krishnan's and Seetha's wedding took place in a very simple manner in the Registrar Office near to his house and the guests and friends, very few in number, were given a simple dinner in a hotel.

Krishnan continued his teaching as a home tuition master as well as in the parallel college and Seetha remained in the house as a housewife doing all domestic duties and serving as a nurse to her mother-in-law. Krishnan's hope of getting a government job was waning but still he continued to apply for Kerala Public Service Commission's tests. The tests were becoming tougher and tougher as to eliminate as many candidates as possible from the lakhs who appeared. A daughter was born to Krishnan and Seetha two years after their marriage. And a son also was born after another three years. Destiny continued to wound Krishnan, and Seetha showed symptoms of liver cirrhosis. The treatment was very costly and Krishnan took a loan from a bank pledging their ancestral property.

At last God heeded to Krishnan's and his family's prayer. He got appointment as a lower division clerk in the revenue department at the age of 38. Maybe he was considered taking into consideration his upper age limit. After 36 one can't apply



for PSC tests. The postman brought the appointment letter on a Saturday when Krishnan was there in his house. Saturdays are holidays for the college where he taught. He was exhilarated when he opened the envelope. He shared the happy news with his parents and wife. They were all jubilant.

Krishnan got down at the town at 9.30 am and took an auto rickshaw to the Taluk Office. The office was open but none was found there. He waited there on the verandah. By 10 am the staff strolled into the office one after another. When they were settled on their seats Krishnan approached the person seated near to the entrance door. There were heaps of files on the table before him.

“Sir, I have come to join as LDC in this office,” showing the appointment order Krishnan told.

“Go and meet the Tahsildar in that cabin.”

Krishnan went to the cabin and greeted the Tahsildar, a gray haired man:

“Good morning Sir! My name is Krishnan Namboodiri and I have come to join in this office,” he handed the appointment order to him.

Looking into the appointment order the Tahsildar asked him to sit. He asked Krishnan’s whereabouts. Then he took the attendance register and entered Krishnan’s name and asked him to put his signature.

“Krishnan, this office is going very smoothly with little complaints from the public. So you have to do your duties very promptly as others are. There is harmony in our work and therein lies our success. Whatever doubts you have regarding the file works you can ask me as well as to the section clerk near to your table,” the Tahsildar told him.

“Surely Sir, I will be very dutiful in my work,” Krishnan replied.

The Tahsildar then called the peon and asked him to show Krishnan's seat. Krishnan was led to a chair and a table heaped with dusty files. Thus started Krishnan's office life. The section clerks seated near to his table introduced themselves to him and extended all help.

Krishnan could learn his section work very easily. The junior superintendent who was his section head was a man of few words and rather a nagging character. Loving words never came from his mouth.

After a month in the office Krishnan became friendly with other clerks and could learn each one's character. He was the only one in the office with post graduation. He found that the entire staff was lazy in their work but greedy for bribe. He could find on some days the peon serving small envelopes to the section clerks and others. He guessed that the envelopes contained currency since he heard the section clerk nearby to him asking the peon how much was there in it.

A week after by 4 pm the peon was serving the envelopes and he offered one to Krishnan. "What's it Raju?" Krishnan asked the peon.

"It's a tip from some generous customer, Sir."

"Sorry, I can't take it. I don't want any present for my duty."

"Sir, this is the practice in our office. Everyone is getting the share."

"I call it bribe and I am against such practice."

"In that case I will have to report to the Tahsildar. Sir, unless you accept it you may be transferred. It happened to some lady clerk a few years back."

"Sorry, I can't do anything against my conscience."

The peon reported the matter to the Tahsildar and immediately Krishnan was called to him.

“Krishnan, don’t be like Lord Krishna. I told you on the very first day that you will have to cooperate with us and go in harmony. These petty amounts are presents given to us very happily by the customers for the service we render to them. We haven’t asked them any fee or reward,” the Tahsildar said.

“Sorry Sir, I call it bribe. Even if they give unasked we are not bound to accept it. We are paid by the government for the work we are doing. I believe it is the people’s money through taxes which we are getting as salary and we are bound to serve them free in return.”

“I don’t want to argue with you. There are twenty two staffs in this office and none finds any wrong in accepting these compliments. You will have to bear the consequences if you swim against the flow of this office.”

“Sorry Sir, I can’t tolerate it. My conscience doesn’t allow me.”

“Ok, you may go to your seat.”

Krishnan went to his seat quite upset. Then other section clerks one by one came to him and asked to change his decision. The superintendents called him to their seats and advised him. But Krishnan couldn’t change his decision and accept the envelope.

Reaching home Krishnan told his parents and wife what had happened in the office.

Seetha said, “If they transfer you to some distant place what will we do? Ma and I are sick. Father can’t alone manage the household activities.”

Then father said, “Seetha, do you want him to be corrupt?”

Whatever be the consequences, dear son, don't accept such money." Mother also supported father's words.

"Dad, I never want my husband to be corrupt. I just reminded the possible consequences," Seetha replied.

"Daughter, we will manage somehow. God is with us," father said.

As expected and feared, Krishnan got the transfer order after a week. He was transferred to a village office at a remote place in the high ranges. Krishnan was unmoved. He decided to file a complaint in the high court after joining in the village office. He was given full support from his parents and wife. He had to stay in a house near the village office as a paying guest. Fighting against the chilly weather Krishnan continued his work in the office serving poor people of the locality. They were given the certificates and other needed documents at the earliest. He could work in the office in the late evenings and expedite the service. Fortunately the village officer was also an honest, service minded man.

Krishnan filed a bribery case in the high court against the Tahsildar and the entire staffs of the Taluk Office. As a student he had pledged that he would fight against bribery when a chance came. He pawned Seetha's gold to meet the advocate's fees. He had already recorded in his cell phone the talks between him and the peon, the Tahsilar, the superintendents and other clerks and other staffs in the Taluk Office regarding the cash envelope which he rejected. He produced the voice recordings as evidence to the advocate.

The trial date came after a month and he was interrogated by his own advocate and the respondents' advocate and finally the judge himself. So also the entire staffs of the Taluk Office and even a few customers who gave them bribes were interrogated by Krishnan's advocate. There was clear evidence of

the bribery which the entire staffs had been accepting from the customers. The judge pronounced the verdict. He in the order requested the government to transfer the entire staff of the Taulk Office to remote areas and cut their future increments for two years. In addition each one of them should pay a fine ranging from Rs. 50000 to 10000, based on their designation, from which Krishnan would be given Rs. 2 lakhs as reward for his fearless fight against corruption. Moreover, Krishnan should be transferred to his home town with an additional increment to his salary.

The news of the verdict covered the front page of all newspapers and flashed as hot news of all TV channels. Thus Krishnan became a hero. He was given a warm reception by the Governor of Kerala where he was awarded the BEST GOVERNMENT SERVANT.

## 5

### **An Email from Senthil Kumar**

From  
senthilkumar1975@yahoo.co.in

To  
kvdominic@gmail.com

Hi Prof. Dominic,

I am really sorry in delaying my reply. When I opened my inbox, I found three of your mails expressing anguish and even anger at my silence. I am sure when you read this mail your anger will dissolve and turn into sympathy.

As you know my mother has been staying with me for several years and she has been under treatment for heart problem since 1990. When my wife and I go to office, my mother would sit alone in the house as the housekeeper. Though she is now eighty she can manage her personal affairs by herself. She used to take her food and medicine at the regular times. So things were going on very smooth even in our absence from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm. Though I wanted to appoint a servant, my wife was against it, since an outsider in our house would steal away our privacy. And my mother also insisted that she would manage herself without a servant or home-nurse. My mother is over-sentimental by nature and as she was aging this sentimentalism also grew up. The tragic or premature deaths of people as it appeared in the newspaper everyday would move her mind to such an extent that she would start crying, tears flowing down her cheeks. Her doctor has advised us that her heart couldn't

K. V. Dominic

bear any tension or sorrow and we should see that she was always happy. So we stopped subscription of the Tamil newspaper and managed with only The Hindu. My brothers, sisters and I came to a decision that no one would tell mother sad and unpleasant things whenever they visit her.

Meanwhile my mother's younger sister, living with family some fifty kilometers away from our place, was admitted in the hospital and we were informed. She fell down from her bed while getting up and she could not stand up or walk. We went to the hospital telling mother that we were going for a marriage feast. We were sure that God would forgive us for telling this lie to mother. When we reached the hospital we found that our aunt was in the ICU and the doctor reported that she had had a stroke and she has become paralysed. We returned to our house in the evening. Mother enquired us about the marriage dinner, the whereabouts of the spouse etc. etc. We had to add lies to lies as to satisfy her. The aunt was discharged from the hospital after two weeks as the doctors could do nothing more. She is still bed-ridden and has now completed two years on the bed—can't speak, can't memorise, the food being spoon-fed. And our mother also lives here quite innocent of her sister's tragedy. She would sometimes enquire us about the aunt's news and request us to phone her. We would tell her that the aunt was perfectly healthy in her house. We have informed our cousins that we had told such an inevitable lie to our mother and whenever they visit her they should not tell her the truth.

Once when one of my brothers met with an accident and broke his leg I was compelled to tell mother that he had a little injury caused by some very minor bike accident. Suddenly mother started sobbing and the pumping of the heart slowed down. As the breathing became very slow and difficult she was immediately admitted to the hospital. After injections of medicine and supply of oxygen she recovered after one week. The doctor warned us against telling such sad news to her.

Thank God, she has had a very loose memory since then that after she was discharged from the hospital she forgot about my brother's accident and his injury. She would often enquire me about that brother and why he was not visiting her. I would reply that he was very busy with his cloth business there in his town. After his recovery he visited her as usual and she was happy at seeing him.

Then one day we received a phone call from the house of our uncle—mother's youngest brother, living some sixty kilometers away from our house—telling us that the uncle was admitted in the hospital and was very serious. Telling mother another lie we flew to the hospital. The uncle was very critical and sinking. The doctor said that the recovery was impossible. Uncle's lungs had severe spores and would meet with his end within a few days. We were again in a dilemma. This uncle is the most favourite one to our mother among her brothers and sisters. Since our mother's father and mother died young, it was our mother who looked after this uncle. She was indeed a mother to him. Whenever this uncle came to our house, the exchange of love between them often envied us. Now, he at his point of death, what shall we do? He is not old, but only 65. What will happen to our mother if the news was imparted to her? We decided not to inform our mother of the uncle's critical case. But our prayer for his life was of no use and he died in the hospital after a week. We were telephoned about his death. We were in a dilemma again. How will we tell our mother that her most beloved brother is no more? The very news will end her life. Is it a sin to hide such fatal news from our mother? What would our relatives and other people say when they know that we had hidden the news from her and not allowed her to see her dearest brother's stilled body before it was cremated? The doctor's warning echoed in our ears as mother's death knells. We thought about it over and again for several minutes. Finally we came to a conclusion that our mother's life is precious to us and so we have



to sustain her life. We went for the burial telling mother another lie of attending a marriage. We announced to the bereaved family that mother was not in a position to travel so long.

Thus mother continued her life with only happy memories. In fact her life was sustained by the heavy dose of medicines thrice a day. Another year passed slowly. One day as I was busy with files in my office I received a phone call. "Brother Senthil, it's me Muthu calling from your house. Please come fast, for mother is very serious." "Muthu, I am coming." I dashed to my house in my car. Mother was lying on her bed with her eyes shut and breathing with much difficulty. I cried, "Mother, mother." But she was not replying. "Muthu, when did you come here?" I asked. "I came fifteen minutes ago to invite you all to my father's death anniversary." Muthu is the eldest son of my above mentioned uncle who passed away one year back. "Oh, you then told mother the purpose of your visit. We hadn't informed mother of your father's death as it will worsen her condition," I added. "I didn't know that brother. Very sorry," he apologized. "Let's take mother to the hospital soon." I suggested. We took mother immediately to the hospital. The doctor gave her injections and oxygen. Her blood was taken for diagnosis. I phoned to my wife, brothers and sisters. They all arrived in the hospital within half an hour. Mother was taken to the ICU and we were not permitted to see her. After two hours the doctor informed us that mother had had a severe stroke. The recovery seems impossible. Her life may pull on but she is paralysed. Just like her younger sister she too became bed-ridden. Mother was discharged from the hospital yesterday and lies in my house longing for her death.

Hope you have understood my position. You can do nothing to soothe me. Kindly pray for my mother.

Love,

Senthil Kumar.

## 6

**Sanchita Karma\***

“Why are you so cruel to us, chasing us for such a long time, but not falling upon us?” the male mouse asked the herd of seven cats, large and small.

“We shall tell you the reason. We are souls of the seven cats whom you poisoned to death in your previous birth. Do you know who you were in your last birth? You were Stephen, an Advocate and this, your wife, Stella, a housewife. I am Preethi, the grandma of all these children and grandchildren. These two are my first daughters, Manikutty and Ammini. The others are their children, Kinganan, Rowdy, Kittu and Kitty. Tell us why did you kill us? What harm did we do to you?” Preethi exploded.

“We don’t think that we had a life before this,” the male mouse said.

“Even if we had one we hadn’t killed anyone,” the female mouse added.

“That’s the problem with you. Your religion then had not taught you of the phenomenon of rebirths. You believed that after your death your soul will go either to heaven or hell. You believed in the shallow philosophy that man is the centre of universe and all other creatures are created for you. You believed that you are created in the image of God and you are His choicest. You can’t remember your past since divinity has lost in you by your unholy, criminal deeds,” Preethy said.

“We don’t understand anything. Kindly tell us what we did in our past,” the male mouse said.

“I will take you back to your past. As I said, you were then

Stephen, an Advocate who lived with your wife, Stella in a big mansion-like house in a vast compound. You had two daughters who were highly employed, married to and settled in metro cities. You had no domestic animals, not even dogs or cats. You had a neighbour, one Agricultural Officer named Krishnan who lived with his aged mother, employed wife and two children. Being Hindus, Krishnan family had a culture distinct from yours. They were vegetarians and believed in the philosophy of Advaita. They were our masters who loved us as their own children. We three generations lived with them for five years,” Preethy broke for a minute.

“Then what happened?” the female mouse asked.

“Krishnan was also a poet. The poet in him moulded him and his family as nature lovers. He had only ten cents of land and there he planted papaya trees, not for him or his family, but for birds like crows, mynahs and cuckoos to feast upon the ripe fruits. He fed crows with rice everyday and kept a basin full of water for the birds to drink and bathe. For us cats he brought salmon fish everyday when he returned after his morning walk. Thus we were fed with rice and fresh fish. They never allowed us to be hungry even for an hour. We belonged to the Ootty pedigree with bushy tail and snow-white fur. They took us like angels and loved like anything. Krishnan bought plastic balls for us and we enjoyed playing football in his drawing and dining rooms. Inexpressible is the happiness the Krishnan family got from our presence there. We sat on their laps longing for strokes which we got in abundance. Very often we slept on their sofa and settees which they liked most. Their guests had to sit elsewhere when we occupied their settee,” Preethy stopped.

“Then why were you killed by Stephen?” the male mouse asked.

“We cats have no boundaries as you mice too. The Creator has created this earth for all animals and plants. He has not given human beings any special right to fence any land. But the selfish man does so. The divine universal instincts in us tempt us

to step over or jump over the boundaries humans make. Thus we lovers of freedom liked to run and play in the vast compound of Stephen. There were great beauties in his compound which attracted us—butterflies, birds, squirrels, grasshoppers etc. Most of the day time we preferred to play there, often running after another in great delight. Stephen and his wife didn't like our presence there. Their petty sense of ownership couldn't tolerate us intruding into their property. Moreover we defecated in the compound, but covered the shit with soil," Preethy stopped for a breath.

"Then you might have entered into his house which provoked Stephen," the female mouse remarked.

"No. We never did it. We never wanted any food since we were well fed by our masters. Stephen might not have liked us defecating in his compound. The paradox is that he and his wife went to church every day. Listened to Christ's message that you have to love your neighbour and even your enemy. Love your neighbour includes loving whatever possessions and properties your neighbour has. Stephen knew very well that Krishnan and his family loved their cats as their children. But the devil in him and his wife nurtured hate for us and it ended in poisoning us. Very early morning before going to church he put some rat poison in fried fish and placed it very close to my master's compound. Which cat is averse to fish? Early morning when we went out from the master's house we smelt the tempting aroma of fish and ate the pieces one after another. We were murdered in three attempts. My Manikutty and Ammini were the first victims. How much our masters shed tears then! They didn't complain to Stephen because he would deny it and insult them in return. Several months after, Kinganan, Rowdy, Kittu and myself were the victims. Our mistress went to Stephen's house then and complained in tears. But they denied the charges and pretended innocent. How my master dug graves for us with aching heart and shaky hands! The poison's effect fled us to our

master's kitchen for water but we couldn't drink. My master and mistress in great agony and wails tried to drop water into our mouth with filler but we couldn't drink and after several minutes of great pain and shrieks we bade good bye to our masters. After a few months our kitty, just three months old, was also poisoned the same manner. It was beyond any tolerance for our masters and they decided not to have any more cats in their house in future. Now you are that Stephen and you, his wife. The cruelty you had shown to us and our masters are the karmas which demanded reaction. The gravity of your crimes was such that it could not be atoned by any punishment when you were still alive as human beings. So you are destined to be born as mice to be chased by the souls of the seven cats you dispatched in your last birth," Preethy exploded.

"We don't want to live any more. We want Moksha.\*\* Kindly kill us as we killed you," both the mice implored.

"We never wanted to do so, but the Almighty orders us to dispatch you. It's nothing but Sanchita Karma. My children finish them now," Preethi ordered and in few minutes the mice were killed and eaten.

\* *Sanchita Karma* is one of the three Karmas or actions of human beings mentioned in Hinduism. The other two are: *Kriyamana Karma* and *Prarabda Karma*. *Sanchita Karma* is the accumulated result of all your actions from all your past lifetimes. This is your total cosmic debt. Every moment of every day either you are adding to it or you are reducing this cosmic debt. Such actions done by you are not ripe to give fruits immediately or on the spot but take some time to get ripened. Such Karmas are kept in abeyance pending in the balance waiting for the opportune time to become ripe, to give fruits in future. Till then they remain in balance and are accumulated. Until their fructification, these *Sanchita Karmas* would not be neutralized.

\*\* *Moksha* is the liberation from Samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth.

## 7

**The Twins**

“Why do you let that cat into our kitchen? It will eat our food when you are away,” I told my wife who was battling in the kitchen in the early hours of the morning. “You are busy with your computer upstairs, and who is there with me to save me from my loneliness? So I have invited Sundari into the kitchen,” my wife replied. Sundari, the name my wife had given to that stray cat, was left out by our nearest neighbours who shifted to another place. Sundari was not that ‘sundari’ (beautiful), but an average cat of native breed with pink and white colours. Being a stray cat it was frightened when I or my son approached. None of us was allowed to stroke her. The very touch and cry of the cat removed my wife’s solitude. In a way I am guilty of leaving my wife alone in the kitchen for many hours. She is not a feminist and so she never insisted that I should help her in cooking. We belong to a patriarchal family line and the men in the family have superiority over women. So my wife was never demanding but I should have helped her instead of giving replies to my email friends. She didn’t like the help of a servant fearing the loss of privacy. When I teach feminism to my students I pray to God to dissuade the students from asking its practice in my own life. A teacher should be a model to the students.

My wife’s friendship with Sundari continued and the bond became stronger and stronger. Still she could not stroke the cat. Sundari became pregnant and after one or two months it gave birth to two kittens, both photocopies of the mother. They were brought down to the kitchen from the berth after a week. Now

my wife had three companions in place of one. Her kitchen work became smoother and happier. I was also entertained by the plays of the kittens. Then one of the kittens was found missing. What happened to it is still unknown. Since my wife was happy with the cats, I decided to buy a beautiful kitten of foreign pedigree, which we could stroke, lie on our lap, and have communication with it. When I expressed my desire, one of my colleagues told me that he would supply me a twin instead of one. Accordingly I went to his house and he presented me a cartel bearing the twins. The carton was opened in one of our rooms after shutting its door. My wife and my son were very anxious to look at the guests. Two angels got out of the carton. Indeed they were very very beautiful. They had snowy white fur except dark spots on their head and tails. The tails were thick and bushy, characteristic of the Ooty cats. Pairs of emeralds on their heads looked at us. The twins were not scared at all. My wife placed some milk before them and they drank a little. Then they started their running. They were identical twins; one had more dark spots on the head than the other. My wife named them Manikutty and Amminikutty.

Needless to say, these twins brought our innocent childhood back. We started to behave like children playing with these twins. Sundari and its kitten were ignored. In fact they refused to come to the kitchen as the twins encroached the place. Still, food was supplied to them in the back yard. A plastic ball was bought for the twins. The way they played football was more thrilling than watching the World Cup. Naturally the agility of these kittens is superior to the World Cup heroes. Along with pleasures, the twins supplied us burdens and restrictions. For the first three days they found our bedroom, particularly the bed and pillows, as their toilet. We had to wash the bed sheets, replace pillows and even changing the bed. As a precaution the bedrooms and the reading room had to be kept shut always. The beautiful sofa cover was pulled down by the twins and urinated

on it. The sofa remained without its cover and it became the place for sharpening their nails. Still, these problems and hardships had the sweetness. Bitter sweetness! Gradually the twins started to use the bathrooms, but not the closets. It was my duty to remove the excrement and clean the bathroom with lotion. It had to be done thrice a day. The twins, when not playing, wanted to sit on our laps. The very jump on to the lap when we were reading or writing pricked our thighs. Once when my leg started to bleed I was worried. I had read that the nail wounds of the cats could cause rabies. As the twins were not affected by rabies, I risked to not taking anti-rabies injections. Manikutty demanded more strokes and cares from us than Amminikutty. She, not satisfied with our strokes, would climb on the shoulder and even head. Though they don't bathe with water and soap as we do twice a day, how clean are their bodies! But how many times they do bathe their bodies with their saliva! We have to learn much from Nature. Their clutches with the nails pained me and I had to wear a shirt always to save my chest, especially nipples. Remember, the kittens had been fed by its mother when I brought them. The third day of their arrival, as I was reading newspaper in the morning, the twins jumped on to my lap and started crying. I stroked them, but it couldn't pacify them. "What are they crying for? They have been fed just now. Have gone to toilet? Yes, that's also done. Then what?" I thought. Why didn't God give speech power to non-human beings? In a way it's better they don't have. The sound pollution which man makes is deadlier than the atomic radiation! The nasty, ugly words which dart from his mouth can annihilate millions! In fact it boomerangs to the Creator Himself! Man plays a discordant note to the symphony which all other creatures make in this universe. "Miau, miau, miau, miau," the twins were still pestering me. "What do you want? What are you crying for?" I asked. "Maa, maa, maa, maa," the tone was different. "Oh! They are calling for their mother," I could read their language. Probably they were asking me where their



mother was. An arrow pierced through my heart. I've never thought of their attachment to their mother. I could read also their mother's moans. Was it not cruel of me to snatch away these little ones from their mother? The thought pricked me and my heart started to bleed. Shall I return the twins to its mother? No, I shouldn't be so sentimental. After all life is a sum of innumerable meetings and partings! God has given His creation the strength to bear such pangs! I sought refuge in such philosophies.

There are many things which we human beings can learn from these 'sub-human' beings. (Are we superior to them except in brain and speech?) The expression of these twins' love—their kissing each other, hugs, licking one another, sleeping on other's body, eating and drinking from the same plate, playing together etc. etc.—are real feasts for our eyes and mind. They are the real beauties! When they are around me I can't pluck my eyes from them. Indeed they are joys for ever! Their dangling on the door curtains, climbing over the grills, sitting together on the TV, dining table, especially on the newspaper, like two marble statues—are treats for us! Once Amminikutty climbed over a window through its curtain and started dangling on the flicker lamp at the foot of my father's photograph. Had my father been alive in the photo, he would have picked the kitten and hugged it, for he was a lover of cats when he lived. In my childhood we reared a cat always to kill the mice. The cats used to sleep with us.

The twins' plays went to such an extreme that they climbed on a tender chilly plant which my wife nursed with extra care on the backyard. My wife used to pluck hot chillies from it. The plant was broken. Instead of anger we felt only happiness. Had the mischief been done by my son when he was a child, we would have punished him, because God has given him reasoning power. Human beings, having developed brains, do all sorts of crimes and evils which other animals never do. One day as I was

having tea in the College canteen, one of my colleagues read the news about the five murders committed by a man. He killed his wife, hid the body in the safety tank of the toilet; two days later he raped his own little daughter, killed her and her brother and buried somewhere; after three days he brought his remaining two children from the school, killed them and locked the bodies in a room. Commenting on this diabolical act, one teacher said, "How can one become so brutal?" I told him rather hot, "Dear friend, don't dishonour animals. Never compare such human activities to animals.' Does any animal attack another without any reason? Except for food, do animals kill other creatures? Do they attack us unless they are provoked, disturbed or scared? The very term "brutal" has to be redefined." All the teachers assembled there agreed to my views.

Things went very smooth in our house. The twins made our house a heaven. Our daughter in New Delhi is eagerly waiting for the holidays after six months to experience the twins' play. She would bring ties for them. As her birthday is approaching I shall present her this story as this year's birthday gift. A few days later my wife told me, "Dear, what would our mother do when she comes here for stay tomorrow? How could she manage the twins when we leave her alone from ten to four on working days?" Our mother is eighty-seven years old, weak and heart patient. She is prolonging her life fed by countless tablets. She has been staying in my brother's house for a few months. She wishes to stay with us for some months. How can I tell her not to come to our house since we have two kittens? I told my wife, "Don't worry dear, mother will manage. Or, shall we give back the kittens to the teacher who gave us?" Though I asked her so, I never intended to do it. "No question of leaving these angels," my wife replied. "OK, we will manage the crisis somehow," I told her.

My mother was brought to our house the next day. She was delighted to see those kittens in the house. She enjoyed their

plays. The next day, Monday, my wife had to go to her school and, I to my college. Leaving mother's food and medicines on the table in her room for her intake at 12 noon, I went to the college. The twins were fed and they were sleeping then. Extra food was placed for them in the kitchen. I prayed to God that the twins should not create any problem to my mother. At one o'clock I returned home for my lunch. When I opened the front door I could hear the gasping sound of my mother. I rushed to her bedroom and found that she was struggling for breath. I asked if she took the medicine. She replied in a very low voice, "The kittens tumbled down the tablets as well as food when I was sleeping." True, I found the scattered tablets on the white-tiled floor which she could not find out. The food was also scattered on the floor. At once I gave her emergency medicine to ensure her easy breath. I cleaned the floor. The twins were found sleeping on the dining table. I started to think, "Who is dearer to me, mother or the kittens? No doubt my mother, who gave me birth and nurtured me to this position." Though reluctantly, I took the carton in which the twins were brought, put the sleeping kittens in it and tied with a twine. Mother was gradually recovering. I told her, "Ma, I have to go to college now. You will be OK after a few minutes. I shall return after one hour." "OK, you may go," mother replied. I took the carton to my car, and drove along the road. Beyond the town I reached a lonely area. I stopped the car. The twins were still sleeping. My heart started to tighten. I felt a kind of suffocation in my throat. It was very painful for me to depart the cats. Am I doing right or wrong? If they were to be disposed so, why did I bring them to my house? Wouldn't they have lived happily in my colleague's house? A series of wounding questions strangled my heart. I have to take a decision. Gathering all my energy, I took the carton and placed it on the side of the road. With shaking hands I opened it. The kittens were awakening. They were startled by the new surroundings. Weeping, I bade them good bye. I got into the car and started the engine. The twins came to the door of the car

crying. Weren't they asking me, "Pappa, are you leaving us? Please don't leave us. Please don't leave us. How will we live? Who will feed us? Wasn't it better that you killed us?" I broke into tears. Suddenly my cell phone rang. It was my mother's. God! Is she serious? "Ma, what happened?" I asked. "Where are the kittens? I don't find them in the house!" mother replied. "Ma, I have left them on the road since they are trouble to us," I said. "Are you mad? What wrong have they done? Do they have reasoning power as we do have? Bring them back," she cried. "But ma...", I whispered. "No but. If you can't, then you may discard me also," she reacted. "OK ma. I am bringing them back," I consoled her. Life was restored to me. My breathing became normal. The suffocation and the aching of the heart disappeared. I got down from the car, took the twins, hugged them, kissed them and brought them back to my house. My mother was happy again that she got back her companions. She had experienced too much of solitude in my house that these kittens proved real companions to her. "My dear son, I can't live without these angels," she said. "Alright mother, I am going to appoint a home nurse for you and the kittens," I replied. When my wife returned in the evening I told her what had happened. She was horrified to hear of my cruelty to the twins. She too agreed to appoint a home nurse. Till we get one I decided to take casual leaves. Thus our house became heaven again!

## 8

### **World Environment Day**

Kaatturaja is the most sought out forest thief in Karnataka, India. As his name suggests he is the king of the forest. Six footed sturdy youth of thirty, he is ebony black with a twisted moustache on his ferocious face. In addition to thousands of costly trees he has stolen he has hunted many wild animals and even elephants for their tusks. The State government has offered ten lakh rupees for those who point out him to the corps. He has ambushed the forest guards several times but fortunately none was killed.

Kaatturaja is the illegitimate son of a tribal woman named Kanni. At the age of sixteen when Kanni was collecting firewood in the forest, two forest guards raped her and left. Though she reported the matter to her parents they were not courageous enough to complain to the police station which was several kilometres away from their hut. Moreover it was a futile attempt to complain since tribal people's wails were never heeded by the government. Illiterate Kanni gave birth to a son and he lived among other tribal children of the forest as a bastard. Kanni was married to a youth when Kaatturaja was only two years old. Thus Kaatturaja lived with his grand-parents despised by all except his mother. Occasionally his mother visited him and presented him sweets and delicacies which he liked most. Kaatturaja grew up from teen age to youth fed by anger and revenge to the establishment and the world which discarded him as an outcast. The tribal people there lived in a very miserable condition. They didn't get any financial

assistance from the government even though crores were allotted to them which were misappropriated and looted by the government officials. There were no hospitals, schools or even good roads for them. They survived on with what the Nature fed them through the forest—tubers, honey, fish from brooks, meat of small animals like rat, rabbit, wild boar etc. Kaatturaja was sent to a school in the nearby village and got primary education. This education opened his eyes and he learnt how his people were exploited by the government and forest mafia. Becoming a youth he decided to alleviate financial difficulties of his neighbourhood by working as a forest thief. He was helped by his friends there and started cutting costly trees of the forest—teak, sandalwood, rosewood, mahogany etc. and sold them to agents of timber merchants. They did it in the thick of forest where forest guards seldom patrolled. It was the money they earned thus which were distributed to the poor families for various purposes such as purchasing dresses from the town, getting treatment for the sick etc. Kaatturaja never had any guilt of conscience for his illegal act but took it as a sweet revenge to the government for marginalising them.

5th June 2011. World Environment Day. Kaatturaja was all alone in the forest and was trying to axe a teak. Being their own day, the forest and its inhabitants were celebrating. Gentle breeze kissed and stroked all trees, birds and animals. One could sense the mirth of the Nature from the chirping of birds, laughing of leaves, mating calls and other happy cries of animals. The teak sensed the advent of its death and cried for help. Insensible to human beings the cry reached the ears of elephants grazing on a mound nearby.

“Isn’t it an alarming cry of a tree?” the tusker asked the cow elephants.

“True. We shall not allow any human being to trespass our dwelling place this special day,” the other elephants replied.

“Let’s charge then,” the tusker said. Kaatturaja lifted his axe to cut and the elephants rushed to him roaring. Frightened he shot up the tree like a rocket. The elephants stood beneath the tree waiting for his descent. The teak thanked the elephants through its rustling applause. Kaatturaja who has never been timid in his youth, started shivering. It seemed that the tree was talking to him:

“Dear friend, what harm have I done to you to instigate you to kill me? See how I became your saviour! What harm have this forest and its animals done to you? Haven’t you felled thousands of trees and hunted hundreds of animals? You and your people survive only because of our presence. Who will axe the branch he sits on? If you continue to destroy this forest, how and where will those elephants and other animals live?”

“I am sorry dear tree. Kindly forgive me,” Kaatturaja started weeping with clasped palms. He then spoke in loud voice to the entire forest: “In the name of this forest I promise you all that I will no more trouble you. Please pardon me for the crimes I have done. I will be your friend from this very moment and devote my life for the preservation of this forest.” His voice echoed in the forest and his conversion was welcomed by the entire forest with cheers. The trees swayed and danced. Birds twittered. Animals cried in joy. The elephants standing below went back swinging their trunks in happiness.

With a sigh of relief Kaatturaja climbed down the tree and thanked it once again for saving his life. He went to his house, changed dress and went straight to the magistrate’s office in the nearby town. He got permission to get into the magistrate’s room.

He told the magistrate, “Honourable sir, I am Kaatturaja, the sought out forest thief. I have come to surrender. I would like to do penance for the crimes I have committed. You may arrest me.”

The magistrate gave orders for his arrest. He told him, “It’s a great thing that you have surrendered. You will be jailed now and inquest will be done. You can tell the court whatever you want when the trial comes.”

Kaatturaja was sent to the district jail. As part of the inquest he was taken by the police to the forest several times. He admitted all charges against him and pointed out the places of the forest where he felled the trees. After a month he was brought to the court for the trial. The public prosecutor pleaded for the government and presented the crimes Kaatturaja had committed. Kaatturaja had no advocates to defend him and he accepted all the charges presented by the public prosecutor. The judge then asked Kaatturaja if he had anything to state or plead before the court.

Kaatturaja replied, “You honour, it is true that I have committed unpardonable crimes and did a lot of damage to the forest. I now sincerely feel that I should not have been so hostile to the forest and the environment. I should have abided to the laws of the government and supported it in its activities for the welfare of the people and the nature. You may punish me. But if the government is merciful enough I can devote the rest of my life for the conservation and preservation of the forest I have destroyed. The court may kindly believe my words that I will no more break the laws of the government but will support to the best of my ability all welfare projects. If you allow me I will make an action force in the forest with my friends and along with them volunteer for the preservation and conservation of the forest. We will not allow any intruders to exploit the forest anymore. As a penance for the crimes I have done we will plant thousands of trees in the forest and thus make it the best forest in the world.”

The judge replied, “The court is happy to hear such good words from you. Taking your words for granted the court is



giving you a light punishment for the innumerable crimes you have committed. You are going to be imprisoned for one year and it is test dose as to see if your conversion is genuine or not. If you prove your goodness of heart you will be released and then as you promised you can make the action force and serve the forest.”

Kaatturaja was imprisoned in the district jail and he was a model prisoner, favourite of the jail authorities as well as the fellow prisoners. He thus showed that he is a purified and sanctified being.

5th June 2012. World Environment Day. The court released Kaatturaja and allowed him to go back to the forest. The forest welcomed sanctified Kaatturaja clapping leaves. Gentle breeze stroked him. Birds sang his welcome music. Monkeys chattered and led him to the midst of forest. Elephants grazing on the meadow sensed his arrival and trumpeted. It was a grand homecoming for Kaatturaja. The forest accepted him as its saviour Raja.

As pledged and promised Kaatturaja made an action force with his friends. The team of energetic twenty youth started afforestation wherever barren lands were found. The forest guards had no duty at all since Kaatturaja's team never allowed any trespassers to steal the forest. After two years the forest became a model to the world and the country nominated Kaatturaja and his team for the United Nations Forest for People Award.

## 9

### **Is Human Life Precious than Animal's?**

Prof. Antony Francis is shocked by the video clip of the 9 pm news in Asianet News Channel. A cow is trying to jump out of the fence of a moving truck carrying an overload of cattle. The street is thronged with innumerable vehicles flowing like a river. The cattle truck is coming from Tamil Nadu to Kerala. Hundreds of such trucks carrying cattle from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh are rushing to the butcher houses in Kerala every day. The cattle traders pack the trucks with more cattle than permitted by bribing the road transport authorities. Poor animals, they suffer horribly, not able to stand well or when tired, unable to rest by lying. The cow might have sensed the danger that she was being carried for slaughter; or unable to bear any longer by remaining in the same posture, she decided to get out of the hell. After a few attempts she succeeded in jumping down. The cattle trader or the owner of the cow sitting beside the driver noted it through the mirror of the truck and got down immediately. The cow was running in between the running vehicles followed by the owner. The cow crossed the divider of the street and ran across the lane of opposite direction. The owner in panic followed it. A truck dashed the cow and she fell down with a loud scream, limbs trembling violently. The cow died instantly. The vehicles stopped. The owner was weeping, not because of any sympathy to the animal but because of the monetary loss due to its death. The video reporter too expressed no sympathy to the cow or sadness at her death. He commented that had the cow not been killed or just crossed the road safe, the

man would have lost his life dashed by the truck. His tone was that of a relief at the man's life saved.

Prof. Antony's wife Teresa was also viewing the TV, and she shared the same view of the video reporter. "God saved the cattle dealer. It's only the cow is killed. Even otherwise it would be butchered within a couple of days," Teresa commented. Teresa is Associate Professor of English in St. Anne's Women's College, a government aided college run by the Christian management in the town. Prof. Antony is Professor of Zoology in the Government College in the same town.

"Teresa, you have no grief at the death of the cow, it seems. My heart is aching at her tragic death. I don't feel any sympathy for the owner. He is responsible for the death of the cow. He is a murderer," Prof. Antony responded.

"Why should we feel so much of sympathy for an animal? God has created animals for man's use and comfort. Similarly all other creations in the universe. Isn't man the centre of all creations? Aren't we the children of God, who created us in His image?" Teresa asked.

"Rubbish. Who told you that Man is the centre of all creations? Or God created Man in his image?"

"Why, the Bible says. Haven't you studied it? Only we human beings have souls and hence the choicest of all God's creations, and thus the children of God."

"There lies the problem. I believe and my common sense tells me that to the Creator all creations are equally good. There is nothing ugly in His creations and He loves all creations—both living bodies and non living bodies, just like a father or mother loving all his/her children irrespective of their beauty, intelligence, health, virtues or vices. It's only because of man's selfishness that he thinks that he is dearer to God than other beings. It's all because of his reasoning power that he thinks in the negative way. Other beings which have no such reasoning power are less selfish and more virtuous than human beings.

There is universal soul and individual soul. God the Creator is the universal soul or Paramatma whose element is there in all his creations—living and non living—which is called jivatma or individual soul. That cow which died might have been a human being in its former birth. May be its soul is going to take a human body again for its next existence.”

“I don’t understand your philosophy dear. I haven’t come across such things in the Bible.”

“You should read other scriptures as well. Being an Indian you should read and absorb Indian philosophy, ethos and culture. You should read Indian epics and scriptures like Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, and Upanishads etc. To some extent you are following Dvaita philosophy as Christianity is based on it. You should learn Advaita Vedanta also. Then you will understand what I say.”

“When you are there as a master teacher why should I go after these books? Since we Christians have been brought up in a tradition where animals are considered as sub human species and created for the welfare and pleasure of human beings, we have lost fellow feelings and sympathy for them. Moreover we are non vegetarians and have no respect for animals’ lives.”

“Now listen to me, how I am going to react to this murder of the cow. To me all animals are my siblings just like all human beings in the world. That exactly is the reason why I am a vegetarian now. If such an accident happened to you what would I do? I will file a criminal case in the court. Yes, I am going to file a case against the cattle trader who murdered the cow.”

“What nonsense are you talking dear? Filing a criminal case for an unknown, insignificant dead cow? Will the court listen to your pleas?”

“Why not? Cruelty to animals is an offence and punishable in our country. There is the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act introduced in 1960 which was amended in 1982. Then there is another Act called Indian Animal Welfare Act passed in 2011

which recommends maximum punishment to the offenders. I will see that the cow's murderer gets maximum punishment."

"If you are so adamant I have nothing more to say. Best wishes to your selfless efforts for the mute creatures!"

Prof. Antony contacted the Asianet TV Channel and collected the details of the truck which carried the cattle. He got the truck's registration number and learnt the whereabouts of the truck, its owner and the driver from the road transport office. The owner of the truck as well as the trader of the cattle was one and the same person, the murderer of the cow. His name was Anthappan. On further investigations Prof. Antony could learn that Anthappan had been doing the cattle trade for the past ten years and had been convicted many times for overloading the cattle and the cattle jumping on the road and running on two wheelers.

Collecting all the materials needed Prof. Antony filed a criminal case against Anthappan in the High Court of Kerala. Since he had studied law and earned a law degree, Prof. Antony decided to plead at the court himself. His colleagues in the college pooh-poohed him when he announced his decision. But he was not dispirited since he knew very well that there were only very few animal lovers in his locality.

The trial date came. It was 20<sup>th</sup> of April. April is the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals month. There were only very few listeners in the court hall. Anthappan, his family and a few friends besides his advocate were present. From Prof. Antony's side there was only his wife Teresa and the daughter and son. They were eager to see how Prof. Antony performed in the court. The judge who was an old man with an ash coloured beard and round spectacles looked very serious. He asked Prof. Antony Francis to present the case.

"Your Honour, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 Mr. Anthappan's truck carried an overload of cattle through the National Highway 47 and when it reached Angamaly a cow jumped over the fence of

the truck to the street and it ran across the divider to the next lane and it was hit by a truck going to the opposite direction. Meanwhile Mr. Anthappan was chasing it. The cow died instantly. The news with the video was reported through the Anshinet TV Channel in the evening. I know there is nobody to plead for the dead cow. So I have taken it my duty to do so. The cow, coming from Tamil Nadu, served her prime life to the people there by giving them milk and dung and when she was old and no longer of use to them, they sold her to the slaughter house in Kerala. The trader Mr. Anthappan should have ascertained the safety of the cow including the other cattle he has been carrying for nearly ten years now. He should have made a strong fence or barricade instead of the one he has on his truck. Again he should have honoured and maintained the laws of animal transportation prescribed by the road transport authorities. Instead he packed the truck with more cattle than permitted. Poor animals, they suffered horribly, not able to stand well or when tired, unable to rest by lying. It is even doubted that he had not quenched their thirst. Exposed to unbearable heat for several hours and aching legs and high fatigue urged them to jump out of the hellish atmosphere. The cow jumped down and thus tried to save herself. Mr. Anthappan chased her and she had to flee for life which resulted in the collision with the fast moving truck. And thus the cow had a very tragic end. I consider it as a murder committed by Mr. Anthappan. He has done such crimes earlier and has been convicted with fines. I have produced documents of those cases before you, your honour. Had it been a human being in place of the murdered cow, what punishment Mr. Anthappan would have deserved, the same punishment shall be awarded to him, I plead your honour. Your honour, is human life precious than animals' or animals' life valueless compared to humans'? Haven't both humans and non humans equal claims and rights on this planet? That's all your honour."

The Judge then asked what the defendant has to say in response to the charges put forward by Prof. Antony. Mr.

Anthappan's advocate sought permission from the Judge to interrogate Prof. Antony and Anthappan. Having got permission the advocate asked Prof. Antony if he has been a witness to the accident. Prof. Antony then explained that though he has not seen the accident directly with his eye he and millions have seen the video of the accident in the TV. And he has acquired the video clips directly from the Asianet Channel which telecasted it and it has been submitted to the court and the Judge can verify the veracity of his accusation. Mr. Anthappan also was questioned by the advocate and he couldn't but accept the fact that the truck was overloaded and it hadn't good fencing protection for the cattle and the cow jumped down and met with the accident. He pleaded for the mercy of the court and promised that in future he would abide by the rules of the traffic and no such tragedies would be repeated. Prof. Antony then reminded the court that Anthappan had given such assurances to the court earlier when he was convicted and has been repeating the same offence again and again after paying some petty fines.

The interrogations having completed the Judge pronounced the verdict: "Since a cow has been intolerably tortured and finally led to its very tragic death, Mr. Anthappan has violated the law of Indian Animal Welfare Act. His action proves to be a criminal offence. Even though he has been warned by the court several times earlier he has not learnt any lesson or felt any repentance. Hence he deserves the maximum punishment recommended in the Act. Mr. Anthappan shall be imprisoned for three years and he has to pay a fine of Rs. 100000 which will be utilized for the welfare of animals." Anthappan and his family and friends were shocked by this extraordinary judgment while Prof. Antony Francis and his family returned home jubilant. Prof. Antony could hear the soul of the dead cow telling him: "I am grateful to you brother Professor. You have avenged my death. God bless you!"

## 10

### Multicultural Harmony

Amar, Akbar and Anthony are good neighbours living with their families in the village called Devalokam in Kottayam District of the Indian State Kerala (popularly known as God's own country). As the name suggests, Devalokam is indeed heavenly—both the topography and the people give it a celestial touch. Rubber plantations, coconut trees, paddy fields, and small brooks flowing like snakes make the village ever green and enticing. It seems that gods from above descend through the tall coconut trees and communicate with the human beings and other beings. Hindus and Christians are the major communities and Muslims are a minority there. They all have been living in perfect harmony and synthesis. There are temples, churches and mosques chanting peoples' gratitude to God for showering all these blessings.

Amar is a farmer living with his wife Seetha, son Anand and daughter Aswathy. He has five acres of agricultural land with rubber plantation, paddy field, coconut trees, etc. Amar and Seetha have only school education and they passed tenth class. When the story begins their son Anand is studying in the tenth class and the daughter Aswathy is studying in the seventh class.

Akbar is a business man, a timber merchant. Though he doesn't possess much landed property he earns much through his business. He lives happily with his wife Ramla, daughter Laila and son Wahab. Akbar and Ramla too have only school education, the former completed ninth class and the latter passed



the tenth class. Laila is studying in the same tenth class of Anand and Wahab in the eighth class.

Anthony is an upper division clerk in the department of education at Kottayam. He has passed pre degree course. He lives with his wife Alphonsa, a housewife who passed the tenth class. They have a daughter Celine studying in the same tenth class of Anand and Laila. Their son Joseph is studying in the seventh class with Aswathy. All these neighbouring children are studying in the Government High School, Devalokam.

Amar, Akbar, Anthony had their school education together in the same Government School, same class till the ninth class when Akbar failed and the others passed over to the tenth. They never had a feeling that they belonged to different religions. Their parents brought them up in such a secular manner that religion never mattered in their social life. Religious festivals of Onam, Vishu, Christmas, Easter, Ramzan, Bakrid were common festivals and they celebrated them inviting others and their families to their houses and feasting together.

Once when there were returning from the school after the classes, Antony said: "Haven't you noted what our biology master taught today? He was teaching us the evolution theory. The theory proves that man has been evolved from ape-like ancestors. But our Bible teaches us that the first man Adam was moulded by God out of earth and breathed life to it. And the first woman Eve was created out of Adam's rib. And that the entire universe was created for them."

Akbar replied: "True we are also taught the same thing in the book of Genesis."

Then Amar said: "Unlike your religions' teachings which you study through Sunday school and Madrasa, we Hindus are not taught anything religious. We read our scriptures and our parents impart us great lessons of our religion. We believe in

*Paramatma* and *jivatma*, universal soul and individual soul, and thus all other beings are siblings of human beings. The element of God is among all creations, living and non living. In my opinion we should believe and follow what science has taught us because it is proved beyond any doubt. Similarities between apes and humans are many and why can't we believe that man is evolved from apes?"

Akbar and Anthony agreed to Amar's views. Akbar added: "When evolution is taken from the religious point of view, God the Father is the creator of the universe and all creations are His children. So naturally we human beings are siblings of other beings on earth. If the relationship between God and man is thus a father- son relation, why should there be innumerable religions and gods among us?"

Anthony replied: "What you have stated is hundred percent true, dear friend. In fact religions were created out of selfishness of man—thirst for power and wealth. Now the religions have degenerated to such a state that their primary motive is exploitation of the ignorant, illiterate, superstitious masses."

Amar: "Well stated dear friends. When we know that God, the Father is the creator of this entire universe why should we need any religion to love and honour our Father? God has given us the divinity and reasoning power to understand what is right and what is wrong. Besides we have governments and civil codes in our country and we know we have to abide by the laws of nature."

Meanwhile they reached the gates of their houses and thus ended the healthy discussion.

\* \* \*

Years passed smoothly and the friendship and harmony among the three families strengthened. They never felt that they belonged to different religions but lived as members of one joint

family. Amar's son Anand completed his engineering degree and got appointment in Wipro Company at Bangalore. Anthony's daughter Celine too studied in the same engineering college with Anand, completed her B. Tech and got appointment in the same Wipro Company at Bangalore. They were in love with each other from the school level itself but kept it as top secret fearing that the parents might object to their inter-religious marriage. They knew very well that even if the parents consented to their marriage the society and the religious leaders would object to it because the Kerala society has become so religiously fanatic. But love knows no religion and they continued to love like two pigeons, unnoticed by others. They resolved to marry after a few years even if the parents objected to it. Once in a month they came to their houses taking one day leave from the office. Sundays are holidays and so they get two full days to spend in the houses. Their travel through buses was in night.

One Sunday when Celine was in the house her father Anthony called her to his room. Her mother Alphonsa too was there in the room. He said: "Celine, you are now 25 and we have to think of your wedding. The neighbours as well as our relatives are asking when your wedding is."

Celine replied: "Father, why should we be in a hurry? Let's wait for two more years."

Then Alphonsa interfered: "Why should we wait? It's already late now. We have no liabilities in the house. Then why should we wait?"

Anthony said: "Daughter, why do you object to a marriage now? Are you waiting for someone? I mean, do you have somebody in your mind? Tell me frankly."

Celine mustered all courage and replied: "Yes father, I am in love with a person."

Alphonsa asked: "Who is that man?"

Celine said: "I am in love with Anand and we have decided to marry."

Celine and Anthony were shocked to hear it. Both of them burst out: "No, we won't allow you to marry him."

Celine was determined and said: "What's wrong with Anand? Isn't he a good natured man? You all love him as your own son, don't you? Isn't he handsome enough and healthy? Hasn't he good income for livelihood? Isn't their family respectable? Aren't his parents your close friends? Then why do you object?"

Anthony said: "Daughter, all what you tell about Anand and his parents are true. But they belong to another religion. Do you think our relatives as well as the parish priest will agree to this marriage? If it happens we will be treated as dissidents, do you know? How can we live here disobeying our religion?"

Celine replied: "True, we are aware of it and we have decided to live in Bangalore after the marriage. There no religion will persecute us. It is such a secular society. Anand says that if the parents object to the marriage as per Hindu rites we will have it conducted and registered officially in the Registrar's office.

Anthony said: "As long as I live I won't allow it."

Having said this he went out of the house to the direction of Amar's house.

Anthony: "Amar, please come out. Call your son also."

Amar: "Anthony, what's the matter?"

Anthony: "Ask your son Anand. What harm have we done to you and your family? Your son is trying to defame us and outlaw us from our religion. We have been living as brothers and how could your son think of defaming us by planning to marry

my daughter? You should have dissuaded your son from such a connection. Instead you promoted him. We will never allow it.

Amar: “Anthony, mind your words. Do you think we would promote our son for such an inter-religious marriage? Why couldn’t you dissuade your daughter from loving him?”

Anthony: “Your son might have bewitched her or she would not have fallen into his trap.”

Amar: “Shut up your mouth and get out of my compound. It is your daughter who bewitched my son.”

Anthony: “I have come here not to stay but to warn you. Tell your son to drop his plan. Let him seek some other lady from his own religion. No more shall you and your family enter into our compound.” Telling this Anthony went back to his house.

Thus the bosom friends Amar and Anthony became foes to each other. The long friendship of more than forty five years was broken by the arrow of religion. Religion which should unite the minds here divided two families. Akbar tried as a mediator to unite his friends Amar and Anthony and their families. But since both the families were inflamed by religious sentiments his words fell on deaf ears. Still the secret love between Anand and Celine continued. There was great pressure from both the families and relatives to break their love and decision to marry. The parish priest came to Anthony’s house and warned the family of consequences if the marriage took place.

Needless to say the accusations and threats from the family members, relatives, and the religious leaders affected the peace of mind of Celine. Because of severe headache for continuous days she took leave from the firm and returned home. She was admitted in a hospital and was found that she had high blood pressure. Even after treatments of several days in the hospital the blood pressure could not be controlled. It was diagnosed that the

high blood pressure caused severe damage to her kidneys. Her health condition was becoming worse. She was taken to a kidney specialist hospital in the city. She longed to see Anand but he was afraid to visit her in the hospital as her parents did not welcome him. All what he could do was to pray for her speedy recovery. Further diagnoses proved that both her kidneys were damaged to such an extent that only kidney transplantation could save her life. Anthony was not that rich enough to amass several lakhs of rupees which were needed to find a living donor. The entire village of Devalokam knew of this tragedy. People prayed for her life. The neighbours, parish priest, pujari of the temple, imam of the mosque visited the hospital and shared their sorrows with the family of Anthony. Since Celine was in the intensive care unit they could have only a glimpse of her through the glass window.

Anand knew all developments through Akbar. He told him that he was willing to donate one of his kidneys to save his darling. Akbar conveyed Anand's intention to Anthony and the family. Since it was the last straw to save his daughter Anthony and Alphonso agreed to the proposal. Then Akbar visited Amar's house and disclosed Anand's wish to the parents, Amar and Seetha. They were terribly shocked at Anand's wish. Then Amar called his son and asked: "Anand what nonsense are you speaking? You are very young and how can you live with one kidney? If it is affected by some disease your life will be over."

Anand replied: "Dad, I don't want to have a future life without Celine. So for saving her life I am prepared to do any sacrifice. Besides, there are many men who have donated one of their kidneys and lead very healthy lives. If we are careful in our lifestyle we need not bother about the health. I have decided to donate my kidney if they are willing to accept."

Amar said: "If your decision is so let it happen. Saving one's life is a great satvik karma."

Akbar relayed the great decision to Anthony and Alphonsa and they were immensely relieved and happy. The news has flashed all over the village and the people glorified the sublime decision of Anand. Anand was called to the hospital and made all lab tests as to find out if his kidney can be accepted by Celine's body. Fortunately both Anand and Celine had ABO blood group and it cross matched. All the formalities of kidney donation were completed soon and Anand's kidney was successfully transplanted to Celine's body after several hours of surgical operation. Greatly relieved and overwhelmed with joy both Amar and Anthony embraced each other shedding tears and asking for forgiveness. Similarly Seetha and Alphonsa hugged each other and shed tears of joy. Akbar and his family too shared in this happiness and reunion of the two families. Hundreds of the villagers including parish priest, pujari, and imam were waiting outside the hospital for the result. They all celebrated the successful transplantation distributing sweets among them. Amar, Anthony, and their families along with Akbar and his family came out of the operation theatre block. They requested the pujari, parish priest and imam to come near to them. Then Anthony told:

“Respected Pujari, Reverend Father, respected Imam and our loving countrymen,

This is to inform you that my daughter's life was saved by the sacrifice of Anand. So Amar and myself and our families have decided to conduct the marriage of Celine and Anand. We will conduct it after three months on an auspices day and the marriage will take place as per Hindu rites.”

Amar then said: “We solicit honourable Pujari, Father and Imam to be present for the ceremony and bless our children.”

The Pujari said: We are only happy to be part of this purest union of two souls.

The parish priest then said: “It is God Almighty who has united them sharing their organs and religions shall take it in that sense giving full support to God’s plans. We will surely be present for the function and will bless the ideal couple.”

The Imam said: “This is God’s plan and man shall not try to make any obstructions.” I will be present for the function to bless the noble couple.

Thus Anand married Celine at Maha Vishnu Temple on 9<sup>th</sup> November. The pujari led the rites and the parish priest and imam were near to him showering blessings on the couple. The entire villagers were present there. After the wedding there was the vegetarian dinner which all feasted with great happiness.

It became a golden day for the largest multicultural country in the world. It added beauty to the wonderful enticing face of India—unity in diversity. Another mellifluous string was added to the multicultural symphony and harmony of India. Witnessing it the entire world smiled.



## 11

### **Clement's Return from UAE**

“Have you booked your ticket, dear? We are all worried about you. Are you alright there?” Merlin enquired over phone to her husband Clement.

“Don't worry dear Merlin, I am fully well. By the grace of God I have got the ticket for next Saturday's flight to Kochi. The flight will reach there by 2.30 pm. I will take a taxi car from the airport and reach there before evening. How is father now? Could you get the telemedicine for his asthma complaint? Have Meena and Jaison slept?”

“Glad that you got the ticket after a long wait! Children have already slept. Since there is no regular class and homework they went to bed at 9.30. I got prescription from the doctor online and bought father's medicine yesterday. Since it is rainy season his condition is worse now. By the by, our house is in the containment zone now. You should come directly to our house and should not get down anywhere.”

“Okay dear, I have been watching the news there every day. Since expatriates are arriving there in large numbers, the number of positive cases shoots up day after day. In fact we are all eager to fly back there to save our lives. Our Kerala government will save us, we are sure. I have to be in quarantine for 14 days before mingling with the family members. So ask mother to make a bedroom ready for me. Let it be the room near to the kitchen. There will be inconveniences, but we have to face it. Till the

quarantine is over such adjustments are necessary. Goodnight dear! I shall call you tomorrow.”

Clement has already been lying on the bed for sleep when Merlin's phone call came. Goddess of sleep hesitated to descend, embrace him and kiss on his eyes since his mind was meandering on the ocean of his past. His mind dived deep to his childhood and started recollecting.

Clement now 40 was born and brought up in a poor family. His father who is an asthma patient now, was an auto rickshaw driver and mother, a housewife. Clement has a younger sister who is married off. Since he was very studious Clement was sent to a government college for degree and then for M Sc Mathematics. Though he passed the post graduation with a first class he couldn't get any government employment. He taught Mathematics in a tuition centre for two years earning a very low salary. Meanwhile, one of his college classmates, Arvind invited him to UAE where he was working as an accountant in a shopping mall. Arvind offered Clement all expenses of his visa and travel. Thus by the benevolence of Arvind, Clement went to UAE and started working as an accountant in another shopping mall. The salary was not very attractive but compared to what one earns in Kerala, the amount was not bad. After his expenses Clement was able to save Rs. 30000 each month which he sent regularly to his father's bank account. After three years, with the money sent thus, his father bought a small house in a five cents' plot. They had been living in a rented house. Clement's sister was married off after two more years with the money amassed. Then took place Clement's marriage with Merlin, who belonged to a poor house. As Clement was against dowry he demanded nothing from her family. She is good looking, loving, meek and gentle. Two children were born to them. The elder one, daughter Meena is now studying in the 3<sup>rd</sup> standard and the younger one, Jaison in the 1<sup>st</sup> standard.

Covid-19 gripped UAE along with other Gulf countries and the lockdown started there on April 5. Clement working in Dubai became jobless as part of the lockdown. The pandemic started spreading like wild fire and the patients flooded to all the hospitals there. Of the ten million population in UAE, Keralites are one million. A quarter of the Keralites' population has registered in the embassy for their return home. Since flights are very less, the passengers had to wait for a long time. Clement has been jobless for nearly three months now and he has been living with the little money left. The total positive cases of Covid patients in UAE have gone up to fifty thousand and more than 300 died. The Arab shopping mall owner has been compassionate and Clement was allowed to continue in his residence without charging any rent. A good amount had to be paid for his chartered flight ticket to Kochi. His wallet is almost empty now. 'What shall I do after reaching home?' Clement's mind wailed. 'There is no bank balance and how will the family survive? Since the lockdown drowned the economy of Kerala, there is no scope of getting any employment even as a salesman.' Unanswerable wounding thoughts made him most upset. It is midnight already and Sleep fears to embrace him. Clement took a sleeping pill and swallowed it. Since the lockdown started he could sleep only with the help of the sleeping pills.

Saturday came and Clement arrived at the Dubai International Airport sufficiently early. Antibody test was conducted at the airport and Clement got the negative certificate which is a requirement for arriving at Kerala airports. When the flight landed at Kochi and Covid-19 protocol formalities completed, Clement phoned to his wife, "Hello Merlin, the flight has landed at Kochi. I will take a taxi and come home by 6 pm." "Already reached? We are all eager to see you. Come soon dear." The phone was grabbed from her hand by the mother-in-law and she talked, "Dear son, Clement, our papa is serious now. Breathing is very difficult for him even though he is taking the

inhaler and tablets. Dear son, will you spend the quarantine period in some hotels so that there is no risk for papa?” “Mama, I have no problem, the negative certificate is with me. Home quarantine is enough just as a precaution.” Clement replied. “Still isn’t it better that you spend isolated in a hotel room? Only 14 days there.” Mother continued. He was shocked to hear this from his own mother. With a sigh he replied, “Okay...mama.” Tears started running along his cheeks. He is denied entry into his own house, which he built with his own money. For the past twenty years he has been working for the welfare of his family. Unable to move further, he sat on a chair near to the exit. ‘What shall I do now?’ He asked himself. ‘There is no sufficient money for hotel quarantine. For 14 days they will charge a good amount. There are no government free quarantine centres for expats. Where to go now?’ He wanted to cry out loudly. Other passengers were going out one after another. “Clement sir, do you know me? Why are you crying sir?” A young man around 35 came to him and asked. “Sir, I am Krishnan, your student. Tell me sir, why you have been weeping. What’s the problem? I am bound to help you whatever it be. Had it not been your help I would not have come to this stage. I failed my tenth class public examinations and only because of your tuition class for Mathematics I passed my exams in the second chance which paved my way for higher studies. I am now an Assistant Professor of English at a government college at Sharjah. Since the college is closed now as part of the lockdown I am going home. What help do you need, sir?”

“Dear student, Krishnan, glad that you remember me. I too recollect you. I have been weeping because I have nowhere to go now.” Clement cried out tears flowing. He then told about his mother’s phone message.

“Don’t worry sir, kindly come with me. I have got a large house which can easily accommodate you. My wife will only be happy to have you in our house for two weeks. We have got a

maid who will serve you food in your room. There is TV and other entertainments in the room which will make you comfortable. God has given me a chance to return service for what you have done to me. My house is only twenty kilometers away. We shall take a taxi and go.”

“God save you dear Krishnan!” Clement replied. “My service to you is negligible compared to your return service offered. I have taken classes for you and many others and I have received the payment for it. Look at what I receive as return for the lifelong service to my family...” He started sobbing. “Don’t take it serious dear sir. It’s because of medical ignorance that your mother reacted so. Please come with me. The taxi car is waiting.” Krishnan consoled him. Clement thus went with Krishnan to his house.

## 12

### Fate of Migrant Labourers

“Why are you crying, Aminul? What happened?” Emran asked.

“My wife is bedridden with high fever and headache. She just phoned me. I am doubting if she is stricken with covid. Many of our neighbours are in hospital and a few have already died. There is none in the house to take her to hospital. She is an asthmatic patient and has been using the inhaler for several years. As you know, there are no hospitals in our village or in the small towns nearby. What shall I do? My relatives are all far away in Kolkata.” Aminul started sobbing.

Hearing his sobs other roommates, Shakib and Tarique came near to him to pacify.

“Nothing will happen to your wife, Aminul. Allah will protect her. He knows that you are not able to go there now and take her to the hospital.” Emran said.

“As it is lockdown here and no work at our site for more than a month now, I couldn’t send enough money home. We four are living here at the mercy of our builder Arjun Saab. He is providing us food free, paying our rent and how can I ask him some money to send home?” Some neighbours would have taken her to hospital at Kolkata if they were provided the expenses. But...what to do? Aminul moaned. Tears were flowing like a brook along his cheeks.

“Why don’t you approach Arjun Saab and tell him your sorrow, Aminul?” Shakib suggested.

“Right, he has been very loving to us and helping us whenever we needed.” Tarique supported.

“Okay, I shall meet Arjun Saab now.” Aminul replied and walked straight away to the house of Arjun just one kilometer away. It was very hot outside, humid with no breeze at all. Aminul felt a hell inside and outside.

Arjun is an architect-cum-builder settled at Kochi with his small family of wife and two children, studying in school. After his M. Tech he started his profession of a builder taking some loans from the bank. Since unemployment is very high in Kerala he couldn't get any appointments in any firms. That is why he launched his own enterprise. He bought five cents or ten cents plots and built houses for the city dwellers. There was a time when he had more than twenty labourers working simultaneously at four to five sites. Majority of the labourers were from North Indian States—West Bengal, Assam, Odisha and U.P. Since the lockdown started in 2020 he was compelled to stop construction of the buildings and all the labourers except the four mentioned above went back to their houses. Aminul is the most favourite of all labourers. Arjun treated him just like his own brother. Emran, Shakib and Tarique are neighbours of Aminul and they came together to Kerala seeking some employment five years back. Luckily for them, Arjun appointed them for his construction business the moment they reached Kerala. Each one of them was given charge of supervising the construction in the various sites. They are very honest and loyal to their master and even if Arjun doesn't visit a site they will ensure that the construction continues without any break or problems. When the lockdown started in April 2020 there were some twenty labourers who had to be fed in their rented rooms. Since the lockdown continued and no wages could be given to them, one by one they went back to their native places. When the 'unlock' started and construction of buildings resumed, a few of them returned. But when the second wave of coronavirus started and the construction had to be stopped as part of the lockdown they went back to their houses except the four, whom

Arjun retained paying Rs. 500 each per day which they were sending to their homes for their families' sustenance. Arjun had to find out a good amount every month to repay the loans in the bank, for subsistence allowance given to the labourers and for his own family expenses. Whatever profit he had earned so far had to be utilized for it.

"How essential is our presence in our houses is evident when one is sick there." Emran said.

"My mother would not have died of covid if I were there when she showed the symptoms." Shakib replied.

"Similarly I would not have lost my father if I could reach there on time." Tarique said.

"Millions of migrant labourers like us are destined to live through an excruciating life. For the past one and a half years we have not experienced any peace of mind." Emran said.

"Millions have lost their jobs; thousands died of road accidents when they made exodus to their States; many have committed suicide when they failed to support their families." Tarique added.

Meanwhile Aminul reached Arjun's house. He was sweating like something and panting since he walked very fast. Arjun was reclining in an armchair ruminating about the cruel fate which he had to face.

"Hi Aminul, what's the news?" Arjun asked.

"My wife is very sick dear Saab. She called me this morning and informed that she is having high fever, headache and cough. She is almost bedridden and there is nobody to help her. As you know we have no relatives around us and the entire village is stricken with covid. Majority of our neighbours are covid patients and many are in the hospitals in the city. A few have already departed the world. What shall I do Saab?" Aminul cried.

"Aminul, do you want to go home now?" Arjun asked.



“Yes Saab. The earlier I reach there the better will be the possibility to save her life.” Arjun replied.

“In that case go by flight today itself.” Arjun said.

“But I haven’t that much money to buy a ticket, Saab. I shall go by train.” Aminul replied.

“Don’t worry about the money. I will bear the expense of your travel. You are like a brother to me. You have been serving me for the past five years. It is nothing but my duty to serve you back in your urgent most need though I am going through a financial crisis. Go to your room and get ready for the journey. I will take you to the airport. There are daily flights to Kolkata and you can go by the afternoon flight.” Arjun said.

“Thanks a lot dear Saab. I have no words to express my gratitude to you. God will reward you, Saab.” Aminul replied with folded hands. He walked speedily to his room. It started raining to cool down his body and mind. Birds were chirping in merriment as if they had heard what went between Aminul and Arjun.

Reaching the room Aminul shared with others the happy news of his flying soon to Kolkata. His friends were relieved and excited to hear that their master is acting as savior. Within half an hour Arjun reached there in his car and took Aminul to Kochi airport taking forty minutes drive. Before getting down from the car Arjun handed over a small bag to Aminul and told him, “There is one lakh rupees in this bag. It is for your ticket and treatment of your wife. Reaching your home, take her to a good hospital at Kolkata and give treatment for her possible covid symptoms. Once she is recovered and able to travel, you come back to Kochi with her and your children. I will take a rented house for you and your family near to my house and you can stay there as long as you like. These corona days will go within a few months and you can earn much to sustain your family. You kids can be taught in the neighbouring government school.”

Tears were flowing from the eyes of Aminul out of happiness. “You are my God, dear Saab. I will never forget this love and kindness shown to me. I will be at your service till I die,” with trembling voice he replied and got down from the car, bade goodbye to the Saab and entered into the entrance of the airport.

After three hours journey, Aminul landed at Kolkata airport. Then he took a taxi car to his village, fifty kilometers away. His visit was a surprise to his wife and children for he had not informed them of his immediate arrival. The condition of his wife Aabidah was critical. In the same taxi car he took her and the children to Kolkata. She was admitted in a government hospital and the treatment started. The RT-PCR test showed that she is positive and detected coronavirus infection in her body. Since it was in the initial stage her lungs were not infected much, though she was an asthmatic patient. After a week’s stay in the hospital she recovered fully and was discharged from there. Reaching home Aminul made preparations for their departure to Kerala. He sold the two goats and a dozen fowls that they grew in their compound. He requested his only brother who lives in Kolkata to look after his house now and then in his absence.

On a fine Monday morning Aminul and his family took the flight to Kochi. Arjun was there at the airport to receive them. They were taken to a rented house near to his house, as promised. Fortunately Arjun was able to resume the construction of a building which situated at a green zone ward of the corporation. Aminul and his colleagues could work there and earn Rs. 1000 each everyday as wage.

In an inhumane society where employers show least love and kindness to employees and labourers, Arjun shines like a star—a polestar showing an exemplary model to all.

## 13

### Nature Teaches

The Chairman of the Municipal Council addressed the councillors: “One of the agendas of our meeting today is to discuss and take a decision regarding the construction of a shopping complex at the municipal plot, near to the Gandhi Square. That plot has been lying there barren for several years. If we build a shopping complex there, it would be an additional source of income for our municipality.”

“But there is a big fig tree on the roadside, in front of the plot. And it is a bus-stop also. Passengers waiting for the buses take shelter from the scorching heat of the sun in its shade. There will be objections from the people if we cut the tree,” Councillor Jairam said.

“This is the only tree left in the neighbourhood. In the name of development we have cut almost all the trees on the roadside. Those trees were planted by the kings who ruled before Independence. Unlike us, they were Nature-lovers and knew the importance of trees and plants for the survival of the human race and other beings. That fig tree is the abode of hundreds of birds in this town. Not only birds, squirrels, flies, honeybees, wasps, chameleons, spiders, ants and several other creatures survive only because of that tree. Haven’t other beings, plants and trees and the like on earth have an equal right to live here as we human beings?” Councillor Krishnan exploded.

“How do you equate other beings and plants with human beings? Aren’t all these created for human beings? Our priority should be the welfare of human beings. Even if that tree is felled, the birds and other creatures will survive. Trees are there in the

suburbs and they can live there. It is my opinion that a shopping complex should be built there and thus we must increase the income of our municipality. Whenever we councillors request for some fund, the reply is always negative. By renting out the rooms for shops, we can earn lakhs of rupees every month,” said Councillor Joseph.

“I fully support the views of Councillor Joseph. Let us worry first about our own people and then we shall think about other beings and plants,” Councillor Ashraf stated.

“We should come to an agreement,” the Chairman Yusef said. “Those who support the project of constructing a shopping complex may raise their hands.”

Out of the thirty councillors twenty five voted for the construction of the shopping complex. Thus it was decided that a three storeyed shopping complex would be built there and for that tender should be invited. The lowest bidder will be given the work and the construction has to be completed within two years.

Councillor Jairam warned: “I don’t think we can cut the tree without any opposition from the people. There are some Nature lovers in our town who assemble there every evening under the tree.”

“We will seek the help of police when the tree is cut,” The Chairman said. The meeting ended.

There was a crow sitting on a window-pane listening to the discussion of the councillors. It frequented there as to eat the leftovers of the snacks after each meeting. The decision to cut the tree thrust like an arrow on its heart. Once the meeting was over, it flew to the fig tree, not waiting for the leftover. It was going to be dusk and all the crows and other birds had come back for their sleep on the branches of the fig tree. The crow cried out loudly as possible: “Dear friends, I have alarming news to convey. I have been listening to the meeting of the municipal councillors at the council hall. They have decided to destroy our abode, fell this tree and build a shopping complex here.”

Then all the crows, mynahs, cuckoos, bulbuls, treepies, flowerpeckers, drongos, woodpeckers, owls and several others birds resting on various branches of the huge tree came closer to the announcing crow. The eldest among the crows then said, “Dear friends, this is our only shelter in this town. Human beings have destroyed all our houses least bothering about our existence. If we lose this house where will we sleep? This fig tree is not only our house but our feeder also. We survive eating its fruits which are found in abundance on its branches. Cutting this tree is equal to killing us all. We shall never allow them to do so.”

The eldest mynah supported, “What right has man to cut down this tree? This earth is not his grandpa’s property. We never trespass upon his house and shut him out. Then why should he destroy our house and deprive us of our food and shelter?”

A squirrel listening to the talks of the birds then said, “I support your views dear friends. We can defeat man’s attempt of cutting this tree fighting unitedly.”

The eldest crow declared loudly, “So we have all decided to fight against man if he comes to cut this tree. Our messenger crow will collect the news of the council’s agenda everyday and thus caution us for action when necessary. We should teach man a lesson that non human beings are never inferior to him, but superior.” The meeting was dispersed and all the birds and other creatures retired for sleep.

The tender for the construction of the shopping complex was finalised and the work was tendered to a company named Vision Construction Company. One Monday morning two woodcutters of the company came with necessary tools--axes, chainsaw etc. The messenger crow had already informed the entire birds and other creatures on the tree about the move of the construction company. So no bird or other animals had gone away in search of food.

Seeing the woodcutters moving to the tree, a group of Nature lovers who anticipated the tragedy to the tree surrounded them and their leader asked, "What are you going to do?"

"We are requested to fell this tree," the woodcutters replied.

"Who requested you?" the leader asked.

"Our Company's manager. The Company is allotted the construction of a shopping complex here."

"No, we won't allow you to touch this tree. It is a shelter to thousands of passengers and abode to hundreds of birds and other creatures. Tell your manager that we won't allow you."

Immediately the woodcutters phoned to the manager and within ten minutes the Chairman of the Municipality and the Manager of the Construction Company arrived there with the escort of a jeep full of police.

The Chairman then told the protesters, "The Municipal Council have decided to fell this fig tree and build a shopping complex here. It is for the welfare of the people that we have taken such a decision."

The leader of the protesters replied, "It is for the comfort of the hundreds of passengers who wait for the buses everyday that we are requesting you to spare this tree. You have not built a waiting shed in this area even though the people have been requesting for it for many years. Those hundreds of birds and other living bodies depending of this tree for food and shelter have nowhere to go. You have destroyed hundreds of trees that served men and other beings on the roadsides of this municipality. What a noble, selfless sacrifice these trees have been rendering! You administrators have no heart to read it. We won't allow you to fell this tree." Saying this he and his followers, some twenty men, lay down around the tree. The Chairman asked the Sub Inspector to remove them.

The Sub Inspector told the protesters, "If you do not go away we will arrest you and take you to the police station."

“We won’t move,” the leader of the protestors said. Thereupon the Sub Inspector ordered the police constables to arrest them. The constables dragged the protesters one by one to the police jeep.

“Now is our turn,” The leader of the crow gave a signal to all birds. All the crows, mynahs, and other birds flew down and started pecking at the head of the Sub-Inspector, police constables, Chairman, Manager and woodcutters. The Sub Inspector gave orders to shoot the birds with the guns. The gun shots went up and one of them hit the huge wasp nest on one of the branches of the tree. Thousands of wasps flew down angrily and attacked the offenders. The police, the Chairman and the Manager got into their vehicles and sped away for their lives. Still the wasps were chasing them. The wood cutters ran away into a hotel nearby. The protesters also ran away to another hotel. The birds flew back to the branches of the tree. After a few minutes the wasps returned to the tree.

One could hear the chirps, tweets, twitters and all such merry sounds of all the birds from the tree, celebrating their victory. The chorus music of the birds was accompanied by the humming of the wasps and honeybees. The squirrels and crickets also played their parts with sharp notes. It seemed like a great celestial symphony.

An urgent meeting of the Municipal Council was held the next day. The Chairman addressed the councillors, “Even though we have decided to build a shopping complex, we are not permitted by Nature to fell the tree. It is a lesson to us that we should be considerate to non humans because this earth belongs to them also. As a compensation for the deforestation done in this municipality, let us plant as many trees as possible on the roadside. I hope you all will agree to it on the ground of what happened yesterday.” All the councillors agreed to the proposal of the Chairman.

## 14

### Seetha's Resolve

“Seetha, how long are you going to remain alone? So many marriage proposals have come and you don't agree to any. You are already 27 now and if you are prolonging, you may not get any husband. Men always want their wives to be younger to them and most of the youths here marry before they are 30. You are our only child and we want you to be married off at the earliest. See, both your dad and mom are not very healthy. Anything can happen at any time. A new proposal has come now through my college classmate, Gopi. His son, Anand is a teacher in the government high school. I have seen Anand in his house. He is very handsome, smart and gentle,” Raveendran spoke to her daughter.

“Dad, I have been postponing my wedding as to get a permanent job in the government service. With my small salary from the unaided college what can be done? Nowadays no family can survive without the earnings of both husband and wife. Moreover an unemployed wife will have no voice in her husband's house. She will be treated as a slave by the in-laws. But as time is fast running and my permanent government appointment is remaining as an oasis I am yielding to your proposal. Dad, I have no faith in any horoscope and if they want to match my stars with his, then tell them that I have no plan to marry him,” Seetha replied.

“Seetha, Gopi is just like me. As we have no faith in astrology and horoscope, he too doesn't have. We used to talk about the exploitation done in the name of horoscope many a



times. So that won't be a problem. Another advantage is that they won't demand any dowry, as Gopi is against it. Whatever we have is for you and your future family. As you know, we have no bank deposit except what you have earned through your teaching. With my meagre pension our family is running. You can imagine how small an amount a primary school teacher gets as pension," Raveendran said.

Seetha's mother Laxmi then interrupted, "In fact your dad got a lump sum amount when he retired, some three lakhs. We planned to use it for your marriage. Since you didn't agree for any proposal at that time, we used the amount for the construction of our house. I too have seen Anand when I visited their house with your dad. I find in him a perfect match for you."

"If both of you like Anand, then request him to come here as part of the proposal next Sunday," Seetha said.

The next Sunday Anand came to Seetha's house with his father, mother and his married elder sister. They all liked Seetha because she was very beautiful in appearance and smart and gentle in her dealings. Similarly Seetha and her parents liked Anand as he was handsome and appearing perfect match for Seetha. The marriage date was fixed for a Sunday one month after.

Seetha has a neighbour named Venu who was her classmate in the school as well as for the degree course. Venu failed for his degree examinations and thus stopped his studies. His parents are labourers working in the cardamom estate nearby. Since Venu could not get any government job he bought a taxi auto rickshaw and lived by its income. He has a passion for Seetha which he nourished in his mind from the school level. Venu is not handsome and because of that inferiority complex he could never disclose his love to Seetha. He offered to take her to her school everyday in his auto rickshaw. Since there were no frequent buses to the town where she is teaching she had to

accept his offer. It took twenty minutes journey to reach the town.

Since Venu's house is very close to Seetha's, he could learn all developments in her house. Venu came to know that marriage proposals are going on for Seetha. One day when they were going to the town in the auto rickshaw Venu stopped the rickshaw on the way and told her mustering all his courage: "Seetha, I have been keeping in mind all these years some secret which I would like to tell you now."

"What's it? Tell me Venu," Seetha replied.

"I love you and would like to marry you," with a shaky sound he replied.

"Sorry, Venu, my marriage is fixed with Anand, my dad's friend's son. He is a teacher in the government high school," Seetha said.

It was a shocking information to Venu that he would be losing Seetha shortly. He loved her so much that he could not think of a life without her. He was under the impression that Seetha loved her mute as his silent love. They have been talking so friendly for several years and he thought that she loved him, though not expressed explicitly. Venu said, "Seetha, we have been known to each other for several years and I promise you that I can look after you very well. I am earning sufficient income."

"Venu, ours is not good match. It is true that you are a nice person, but my parents won't agree to our marriage. See, though not a government job, I am a teacher by profession and what about you? Very sorry, ours is not a good match."

"Okay. I dreamed a lot . . ." Telling this, Venu started the engine of the auto rickshaw and it moved to the town. They didn't speak anything further. The rickshaw stopped at the gate of the school and she got down telling thanks. He didn't accept

the fare she offered. He looked very moody not even caring to look at her face.

Seetha too lost her peace of mind. Venu being her neighbour she will have to meet him everyday. In the evening when she returned home she told to her parents what had happened.

“What qualification he has to marry you?” was the reaction of her father. Her mother too was worried of Venu’s approach to Seetha.

The next morning as usual Seetha got ready for her journey to the college. As to avoid going in the auto rickshaw of Venu, she got ready early to catch the bus that goes to the town thirty minutes before. When she moved to the road there came Venu with his auto rickshaw. Reaching very close to Seetha he threw some liquid on her face and sped away. It was acid and Seetha ran back to her house crying loudly “Save me.” Reaching home she cried, “Venu threw acid on my face. Dad, pour water on my face and take me to the hospital soon.” Seetha’s dad and mom were horrified to hear it and crying they took a bucket of water and poured on her face with a mug continuously. Raveendran immediately phoned to his neighbour Joseph and he came with his car. Seetha was taken to the Medical College in the town and the doctors immediately started treatment for her burns. The right side of her face and neck was burnt deeply. Fortunately acid has not fallen on her eyes, lips or ears. The first aid with the water lessened the gravity of the burns.

Raveendran reported the case to the police station and Venu was arrested within a couple of hours. Venu cooperated with the inquest and accepted that he did the crime. He told the police that he committed the crime as to avoid Seetha being owned by someone else through marriage because he loved her so much. None filed for Venu’s bail since the crime was unbailable and he was imprisoned in the jail till the prosecution at a later date.

It took nearly one month's treatment in the hospital for Seetha's burns to be cured. Though the skin and the flesh below got cured the acid hit area got disfigured with shrunken black skin. It was horrific to look at her face. Seetha was discharged from the hospital after a month and she was totally upset. She didn't want to face any one on earth except his father and mother. She refrained from looking at her face on a mirror which made her cry. She preferred remaining in her room shut. Needless to say Seetha's marriage with Anand had to be dropped and her dream of a happy married life burst out like a bubble.

Meanwhile the prosecution of Venu was completed and he was sentenced to ten years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of one lakh rupees to the victim. He was put in the Central Jail of the State.

The entire village was shocked at the tragedy of Seetha and the people wept at her fate. Her neighbours, relatives, colleagues, teachers and students prayed for her recovery and return to normal life. Many of them visited her house but she was unwilling to face them. Three months have passed after the mishap and one day Seetha's dad went to her room and said, "Daughter, how long are you going to lead a secluded life in this room? The world around you is full of love and sympathy for you. They all pray for your happy future. Your loving students have come here with the principal to visit you. Please come to the living room where they are waiting for you. You can hide the burns with your saree."

Seetha very reluctantly, covering her head with her saree and hiding the frightening scars, appeared before the visitors with a smiling face. The principal and the students greeted her good morning. She too greeted back and sat on a chair. The Principal, Dr. Mukundan then said, "Seetha teacher, we are all extremely sad at your tragedy. We can be happy only when we find happiness in you. You have been so indispensable to our college and your students love you so much that they don't want any substitute for you to teach them. Kindly oblige to their

request. You know how loving your colleagues are. They are all waiting for your return. As to avoid the gaze of the public we would arrange a taxi car for your journey.”

“What the principal sir suggested is acceptable dear daughter. You will have no problems from anywhere and moreover regaining your favourite profession will bring you back the happiness lost,” Raveendran said.

“Absolutely true,” Seetha’s mother Laxmi said. “How long are you sitting sad in your room? It will kill you and both your dad and mom. By doing service to your loving students God will reward you with happiness.”

“If all of you are pressing thus I shall continue my teaching. After all what is left in my future? Because of me I don’t want to see my dad’s and mom’s tears. So I have decided to live for others doing whatever service possible,” Seetha replied with tears welled from her eyes.

All were happy at her decision. The principal then said, “We are extremely grateful to you dear Seetha teacher. You may regain your teaching from tomorrow itself. We will send you the taxi car in the morning.”

The Next morning Seetha got ready for her teaching profession wearing a saree and covering her burnt face with the tip of it. The taxi car took her to the college and she was given a warm welcome by her colleagues and students assembled at the front yard. She was given a bouquet of beautiful flowers by the principal Dr. Mukundan and led her to the staff room. To the shower of love from the students and the staff Seetha’s sorrows and loneliness surrendered. She became as happy as before. She found peace and happiness in her life with the students.

Needless to say Seetha became very popular in the town and media published reports on her miraculous come back to life. Usually acid victims are neglected by the society and they take refuge in the rehabilitation centres established by NGOs. She took special classes for the weak students in the morning

and evening—before and after the regular class hours. The taxi car was avoided as per her request and she started commuting in the line bus. She would reach the college at 8.30 am and leave only by 5.30 pm. Thus in addition to the regular classes she taught the weaker students three hours. Besides, she was in charge of the National Service Scheme of the college and did marvellous exemplary social activities under it.

The State government decided to promote Seetha's unaided college to a government aided one taking into consideration the best result and the social service activities. Thus the teachers including Seetha started to get higher government salaries. It was a great relief to Seetha and her parents. Even though a married life is impossible for her there was nothing to be financially worried about their future life.

The NSS unit of Seetha's college was awarded the best unit in the State. Seetha's service and commitment came to the notice of the State government and she was chosen as the best teacher of the State and recommended her name for the national award. The nation no doubt honoured her as the BEST TEACHER of the year. Receiving the national award from the President, she spoke, "I dedicate this award and honour to the thousands of acid victims in the world. I could come back to my life and rise to this stature only because of the love and compassion shown to me by the people around me. Hence I request all my countrymen to shower love and concern to the victims who are destined to live hellish miserable life in their houses and rehabilitation centres. It is for no reason of theirs that they became victims of such inhuman atrocities. Given proper love and compassion these victims can come back to normal happy life like me." The entire audience welcomed her request with huge applause.

## 15

### Old Age Home

“Hello friend, I am Ravi, an inmate of this old age home for nearly ten years now. Hope you are a new member who joined us recently. Kindly tell me your name.” Ravi, aged 80, introduced himself sitting on a chair opposite to the stranger in the parlour.

“Glad to meet you, dear Ravi. I am Jacob who joined this home three days ago.” Jacob replied.

Ravi: “I would like to know more about you. It would be proper if I tell you my history first before seeking yours. I am a retired college professor from Kochi. I have none to look after me. My wife passed away ten years back and we have no children. Unfortunately I am the only offspring of my parents and I have no relatives to depend upon. In fact I wanted to adopt a child but my wife was against it. She too was a college professor in my same college. She died of cancer at the age of 68. Left all alone, I decided to seek refuge here. The pension I am drawing is given to the managing director of this home for my accommodation and care. To be frank, I am very happy here and fortunately I don't have any serious health problems. Now kindly tell me your whereabouts.”

Jacob: “Very glad to hear that you are happy in this home. Though childless a man, you are fortunate in a way when compared to me, a father of three children. I am a farmer by profession. Though a graduate I couldn't seek any government job since I was the eldest son of my parents and my father

needed my help in managing the five acres of agricultural land we have. My three brothers and two sisters are all highly educated and they are all employed and settled with their families in the States. Since they didn't want any share of the landed property I am bequeathed of all the five acres. My parents died some twenty years back. I have been fully satisfied with the farming occupation and my wife Mercy was my right hand, always helping me in the farmlands from morning till evening. All kinds of farming were there—paddy, coconut, nutmeg, cocoa, banana, mango and varieties of vegetables. I believe that agriculture is the happiest of all professions. To be in the lap of Mother Earth, savouring her bounties, communicating with her offspring—the plants, animals, birds, flies is a heavenly experience. Of course there were occasional moments of sorrow caused by drought and excess rain. After all, they are the ways of Nature.” Jacob paused for a moment.

Ravi: “How pleasure giving your talk is, dear Jacob! Kindly continue your history.”

Jacob: I have three sons and no daughters. We gave them good education and they were all brilliant in their studies. All got admission for medical studies and became doctors. They are all married and are settled with their families in the States. As they desired, our ancestral house was demolished and at that site they built a large palatial house. They visit us once in a year, staying with us just a month. Wedded to farming, I couldn't sit idle even though the children insisted me to keep away from such agriculture. Along with my two labourers I went to my farm lands in the morning and worked till evening. My sons wanted to take me and Mercy to their houses in the States and stay with them. But for me leaving my land is like leaving my body and we told them that we would stay in our house till we die. As you can imagine, my sons can't forgo their huge income and luxurious life there and work in our country earning very less. On the contrary, our grand children longed to stay with us for more days



and play in the lap of Nature, to be in the company of the cows, dogs, cats, fowls, butterflies, birds etc. And we too enjoyed their sweet presence. No doubt, they yearned for more our presence than their parents'. It was with tears that we saw them off after their vacation here. We had to accept the reality that our children and their families couldn't stay with us for ever since they are all American citizens and enjoy life there." Jacob paused to wipe out tears from his eyes.

Ravi: "I can read your mind, Jacob. How painful it is for you to be away from your children! And where is your wife? Is she living with them in the States?"

Jacob: "No. She departed the world leaving me all alone last month. She hadn't any serious health problem. She caught fever and was taking medicine for it, but suddenly collapsed in the kitchen in the evening. With the help of the maid she was taken to the hospital, but she died on the way." Tears started flowing through his cheeks.

Ravi: "Don't cry dear Jacob. After all she was old like you and one day or other we have to leave this world. Death is waiting with his chariot to take us all one after another. I feel that she had a happy death. And we shall pray for such painless, trouble free death."

Jacob: "True, she had a happy death. But I can't live any moment without sweet memories of hers. She had been my soul mate and right hand for long 60 sixty years. Only time can cure my bleeding heart." He started weeping again.

Ravi: "Calm down dear Jacob. Don't weep. Did all your children come for the burial of your wife?"

Jacob: (wiped his tears) Yes they all came for the burial and after fifteen days with me they went back leaving me here. They asked me to accompany them. But I said that I can't leave my house and land. I told them that I would stay in the house alone

and the maid would come every day to cook food for me. But they were not willing to leave me alone. Who is there to care if anything happens to me in night?—they asked. I told them that nothing would happen to me since I have no health issues. But they insisted that I have to be sheltered in a very good old age home. Thus I had to leave my house and land and they brought me here. They have given a large amount to the manager of this old age home for my care and stay. Before leaving me they said that they would talk to me over phone every day. Like me, they were also in tears when they departed me. Thus I have been living a hellish life here for the past three days. Of course I get whatever food I need here. The room I stay is very comfortable with AC, TV and all such requirements. But I have no enjoyment in anything. Very little food I take. My mind is full of memories of my wife. I long to go back to my house and land, but I am imprisoned here...My children can't read the agonies their father...the pangs of loneliness..." Tears brimmed his eyes.

Ravi: "Calm down, Jacob. This is the fate of all parents whose children are abroad. There are thousands of parents like you in hundreds of old age homes grieving like you. This is the way of the present world. Kindly take life philosophically like me and enjoy life till it leaves our body. It is already late now. Let us go to our beds. Goodnight Jacob!"

Jacob: "Goodnight Ravi!"

It was 10.30 pm. They went to their beds.

Early next morning Ravi woke up to the knocking sound on the door. The room boy greeted him with the sad news that Jacob was found dead on his bed. Might be cardiac arrest!

## 16

### Compassion Rewards

Madhavan Nair is a retired primary school teacher aged 58. He retired from a government school two years ago. He lives with his wife in a small house at Thrissur not far away from the school. With whatever he could earn from his service, he could give good education to his two daughters. Though they tried for some government jobs they couldn't get any. With the retirement benefits he received, Madhavan could marry them off to loving husbands who are able to protect them.

Having no landed property except the five cents where house is built, Madhavan spend his time reading books and going to the village library in the evenings. Madhavan's wife Suseela, as her name reveals, is a gentle lady, very lovable to the neighbourhood. Madhavan too is a very dignified person, most affable and respected by all. Though his pension is very less, it is sufficient for the small family to meet its expenses. Their daughters with their husbands visited them frequently. Thus the life of Madhavan and Suseela flowed smoothly with bubbles of happiness.

Suddenly fell a lightening of extreme grief on Madhavan's life. Due to severe stomach pain Madhavan consulted a doctor in the government hospital and in the blood test and scanning that followed it was found that Madhavan's liver was severely damaged by cirrhosis. The reason might be hepatitis. The doctor advised him that liver transplantation was the only remedy to save his life. The advice was a thunderbolt to Madavan and his wife who became speechless. For liver transplantation more than

twenty lakhs rupees are needed and a donor has to be found. Suseela is willing to donate her liver to save her husband provided it is matching to his body. Suseela told the doctor that they were too poor to meet the huge expenditure. The doctor advised them to meet a leading newspaper reporter and request him to report the case imploring readers' benevolence and financial help. Accordingly, Madhavan approached his friend, a reporter of the Malayalam daily, *Mathrubhoomi*. The report came in the newspaper the next day with the photo of Madhavan and his wife standing in front of their small house. Madhavan's phone number and bank account number were also added in the report. Madhavan and his wife prayed to God to shower mercy and compassion in the minds of the rich readers of the newspaper and eagerly waited for phone calls and alms to the account.

The door bell rang. "Someone has come. Go and open the door, Suseela" Madhavan said.

Suseela opened the door and found a stranger.

"Is it Madhavan sir's house?" He asked.

Suseela: "Yes. He is resting in the bed. Kindly tell me who you are."

"I am Rahim, one of his old pupils in the school. I would like to meet him." He replied.

Suseela: "Kindly come to his bedroom. He is very weak. Can't walk without help."

Suseela led Rahim to Madhavan's bedroom.

Rahim: "Pranam, dear sir! I don't know if you can recognise me. My name is Rahim. I was your pupil and you taught me from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> standards. It was some fifteen years back."

Madhavan: “Very sorry, dear Rahim, I am not able to recollect your face. No doubt you are no more a child now and the face has changed. Where is your house?”

Rahim: “My house is near to the main market and my father is Salim, whom you may know.”

Madhavan: “Salim’s son? You have changed a lot, Rahim. What are you doing now?”

Rahim: “I am a software engineer in UAE. I am on leave now. Had it not been you, I would not have come to this position.”

Madhavan: “What is there in it, dear Rahim. I have taught hundreds of pupils and many have got employment and are living very happily. It is not because of my merit that they came to such levels, but because of their hard work.”

Rahim: “You are right, dear sir. I am indebted to you not because you taught me but because you saved me from imprisonment.”

Madhavan: “I don’t understand. Kindly explain how I saved you.”

Rahim: “I shall explain everything. When I was studying for my B. Tech. course I had bad classmates as my close friends. We used to take drugs in the form of cigarettes standing near to the mini bus stand. We were in the college uniforms and one day about 9.30 am while we were smoking, you noticed it and came near to us. You advised us to throw away the cigarettes as they are injurious to health. We were under intoxication and my friends shouted at you and pushed you to the ground asking who you were to advise us. Though I didn’t push you I was also a culprit. Your head was broken and bleeding and people swarmed around you and took you to the nearby government hospital. Meanwhile we all ran away. In fact we were all worried at the

thought that you would complain to the police. Since my companions were not your pupils you would not identify them and report their names to the police but I was sure that you would tell my name to the police and I would be arrested. Do you remember that incident, sir?”

Madhavan: “Yes, I do remember. I was then waiting for a bus to visit one of my uncles who was hospitalised. When I found you students smoking in the public place, as a teacher I thought it is my duty to advise you. That is why I approached you. And I knew that you are my old pupil. Having fallen on the ground I fainted. It might be due to the loss of blood. Fortunately the head injury was not serious. Those who took me to the hospital complained to the police the very moment and two policemen came to my bed in the casualty. They asked me what had happened. I told them in detail. They then asked if I could identify anyone of the assaulters. Though I know your name and all details about you I didn’t disclose it to the police thinking about the consequences that would befall to you and your companions.”

Rahim: “Yes sir, it is because of your benevolent and compassionate mind that I became what I am now. Having escaped from the imprisonment I decided to stop smoking and never use drugs in my life. And my friends also changed like me. We thanked you in our minds and also God for instilling compassion in you. Had I been imprisoned my life would have been an entirely different one. After my B. Tech degree I applied for jobs in the UAE and got it easily since my uncle is there. Now let me tell you why I have visited you now. I have read about your fatal illness in the *Mathrubhoomi* and how you are yearning for financial help from the readers. Fortunately I am rich enough and I can help you, dear sir. For the liver transplantation, have you come across any donor?”

Madhavan: "I have no words to express my gratitude to you, dear Rahim. My wife is willing to share part of her liver with me and on blood test it is found that her liver is compatible with my body. What is required is Rs. 20 lakhs as charges of the operation and related treatments. But we have not even one lakh rupees with us." Tears started to flow over his cheeks.

Rahim: "Please don't cry, dear sir. Here is the money you require." He took a cheque book from his bag and filled a leaf of it and signed, crediting Rs. 20 lakhs to Madhavan's account. Rahim handed over the cheque to the trembling hands of Madhavan. Tears of joy flowed from the eyes of Madhavan and his wife.

Madhavan: "God bless you, dear Rahim! We are indebted to you forever."

Suseela: "God will shower all blessings on you, dear son. We will always pray for you and your family."

Rahim: "It is my duty to help you when you are in such a dire necessity. You have pulled me up from the hell of drugs and converted me to a hardworking student which enabled me to reach this position. Hence this is my humble gift for the compassion you showed to me. This is my card. You can call me whenever you need my help. Kindly start the treatment procedure tomorrow itself. I will visit you in the hospital after the surgery. I will be going back to the UAE after a month." Rahim bowed and touched Madhavan's feet and walked out to his car and drove away.

## 17

**Coffin Maker**

“Papa, why don’t you give up this fearsome profession? Can’t you find out a better job that gives happiness to you as well as to us, family members?” Elsy asked her father Peter who was making a coffin in his shop adjacent to his house.

Peter: “Daughter, what else job can I seek when unemployment is at its apex in our State Kerala. As you know, I am not healthy enough to go for daily wage labour in agricultural lands or construction sites. My father had been doing this job to sustain our family and I had been apprenticed by him to help him in the shop. This is the only job I know and we are meeting our needs from the returns of the sale.”

Elsy: “Tell me papa, don’t you long for or even pray for people’s death? Is it not a sin?”

Peter: “Usually I don’t wish for people’s death. Since death is a natural phenomenon like birth, it has to take place regularly. But there are some days when not even a coffin is sold. As you know, there are many other coffin shops in this town. On those days I wondered why there were no old age deaths. But I never wish for premature deaths.”

Elsy: “Then why have you made small coffins for kids? Look at that small one on that shelf.”

Peter: “When one comes to the shop for a kid’s coffin, how we can say no? In fact, when I make a kid’s coffin my hands shiver due to the mental agony. I pray to God to spare kids from death and let there be no customer to buy the one I make.” Tears sank his eyes.



Elsy: “Papa, this job gives you no satisfaction and not much gain for the pain you take. Why not take a loan and start a lottery selling booth? No much physical labour is needed for that job.”

Peter: “There are innumerable lottery sellers in this town, dear daughter. At the most one can earn only 500 to 600 rupees a day. It can suffice only our minimum necessities a day. For yours and your brother, Alex’s study we need much money. Moreover for medicines for me and your mamma more than a hundred rupees are needed a day.”

A stranger appeared at the shop then. “I want a good coffin.” He said. He looked intently at the face of Peter and asked, “Are you Peter?”

Peter: “Yes, my name is Peter. Kindly tell me who you are.” Meanwhile Elsy left the room through the back door to her house.

“Don’t you remember me, Peter? I am Afsal, your classmate. We studied together in the high school. You were then the best pupil in the class, best in studies and other extracurricular activities. You were the school leader also. Why is that you are running this shop? Didn’t you go for higher studies and try for a better occupation?” Afsal asked.

Peter: Now I remember your face, dear Afsal. It is long twenty five years since met each other. You have changed a lot, Afsal. You were then a very lean boy. And shy too. Not mingling with others. I couldn’t go to college for higher studies. We were then living in a village and the college was far away in the town. My parents were poor and they couldn’t afford to send me to college. This shop was originally run by my father. He asked me to help him in the shop when my school education was over. Thus I have been chained here for the past two decades. My father died ten years ago by cardiac arrest. The responsibility of looking after my mother, wife and two children rested on my shoulders and I couldn’t seek any other job. I am now an

asthmatic patient under treatment. My mother is almost bedridden and wife has arthritis complaints. In fact I don't like this job. But there is no other option to feed my family. Horrifying images of death are dancing around me whenever I work here. No pleasing positive thoughts enter my mind." With wobbling sounds Peter continued, "I can't make any coffin controlling my mind from meandering through the images of illness of my mother and wife. I always pray to God to avoid a situation of using the coffins I have made for burying my mother and wife." Tears flowed from his eyes.

Afsal: "Don't cry, dear Peter. If you are willing I can save you from this hellish job. I have now come to buy a coffin for my neighbour. My neighbour Mathew, aged 50 died of cancer. There is none to help the family for the funeral arrangements. Kindly pack that coffin. How much does it cost?"

Peter: "Six thousand rupees. Kindly wait ten minutes to make it ready for use."

Afsal: "Okay. I shall wait. Meanwhile let me tell you what I am now. I am working in a factory in Kuwait. The managing director of that factory has requested me to bring an employee when I return after a month. It is a very good factory which exports organic chemicals. They give good salary. Are you ready to come with me?"

Peter: "Surely, I will be extremely grateful to you if you can save me from here. But I have no money with me for the tickets, dear Afsal."

Afsal: "Don't worry; the company will bear all expenditure. Have you got your passport?"

Peter: "Sorry, I haven't taken it since there is no chance for me going abroad."

Afsal: "No problem. You may apply for it tomorrow itself. You will get it within a week. Once you get it we shall apply for your visa and the tickets. I hope your family can manage in our absence. How old are your children?"

Peter: My daughter is 21 and she is studying for her B. Ed course. My son is 19 and is studying for his B.Sc. Physics. They both are studying in the government colleges in this town.”

Afsal: “Since your son is mature enough he can buy things for the house. So your absence will not make a crisis for the family. You can send money to the family every month. You may tell your family about this golden opportunity and seek their permission to leave.”

Peter: “Surely dear friend. I believe they will happily allow me to seek this employment abroad. You are an angel sent to me by God to save us from the ocean of grief. Inexpressible is my gratitude to you, dear Afsal. Our family will be indebted to you forever.”

Afsal: “Peter, a friend in need is a friend indeed. This is a simple help I can render to you and I am not losing a single rupee for it. The happiness I get by saving you and your family is eternal. What else do I need? Kindly apply for your passport tomorrow itself through Akshaya Kendra. Keep this money with you. There are twenty thousand rupees. (He gave the money to Peter’s hand) You may buy necessary groceries for the house, three pairs of dress for you and give the rest of the money to your wife for one month expenditure. If the coffin is ready kindly call a taxi jeep to carry it.”

Peter called for a taxi jeep and the coffin was put into it.

Afsal: Let me go, Peter. When you receive the passport, call me. This is my visiting card. (He gave his card to Peter) Good bye Peter!”

Peter: “Good bye Afsal!”

Peter couldn’t believe what happened. Was it a dream? God heeds one’s prayers in strange ways, his mind whispered to him.

Needless to say, Peter went with Afsal to Kuwait after a month and started a new happy chapter in his life.

## 18

### Sweeper's Dreams

Laxmi is a sweeper of Thodupuzha Municipality. She is not a permanent staff, but only one of the contingent workers of the municipality. Her monthly salary is just Rs. 20,000. Her husband Sivan was a taxi driver, but due to an accident he has become handicapped--right leg amputated. They have two children, son studying in 10<sup>th</sup> standard and daughter in 8<sup>th</sup> standard. They live in a small rented house paying monthly rent of Rs. 5000. With Laxmi's meagre salary it was very difficult to make both ends meet.

Laxmi's sweeping duties start very early in the morning. Hence she gets up at 4 am and finishes cooking and other domestic activities in the house and reaches the municipal office by 6 am. Taking her broom she goes to the roads and market where her duty is assigned. Though she is in the uniform with gloves, boots, face mask (all provided by the municipality), the stinking smell of the garbage on road sides and the market makes her work intolerable. Those who throw away such waste never think about the life of the miserable ones who are destined to remove them every day.

Laxmi had a school education up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard and since her parents were poor she could not go for college education. Her parents were agricultural labourers and when Laxmi was twenty she was married to Sivan who was their neighbour. Many of her classmates are employed in government and private sectors. Once when Laxmi was sweeping the Gandhi Square, close to the bus stand, she met one of her 12<sup>th</sup> standard classmates. Laxmi called her by name: "Mary, where are you

going?” Mary looked at her with a frowning face. Laxmi added: “I am your classmate, Laxmi.” Mary didn’t reply and turned her face and went towards the bus stand. Laxmi was shocked. Tears ran over her cheeks. She guessed why Mary had looked at her with a stranger’s frowning face and shunned away. It is her dirty profession that keeps people away from her. None dares to come near to the sweepers. Sweepers are not permitted to dine with others in restaurants. They bring their meals when they go for duty. It is true that the foul smell of the garbage will remain with their uniform and they can get rid of them only by removing the clothes and washing the body several times with good smelling soap. ‘Why is fate so cruel to the poor?’ Laxmi used to think of it very often. None of her classmates is fated to do such humiliating job. Had she been born in the West she could have got high salary for the same profession and earned respect from the public. Unfortunately that dignity of labour is absent in India. How much she longed to go out with gaudy dresses like her classmates to attend marriage functions, festivals, sightseeing etc. Even if she goes out well dressed she is treated low as a sweeper by the cruel society. How can the society forget the great service sweepers are rendering? If they strike work for a few days what would be the situation of our towns and cities? Can anyone go out without shutting one’s nostrils and wearing neat shoes? Not only the society, but also the administrators are cruel to them. Sweepers never get the proper remuneration for their work.

One day Laxmi’s son Arvind returned home from his school crying.

Laxmi asked him: “Dear son, why are you crying? What happened?”

Arvind: “Mama, one of my classmates, Mathew abused me calling me son of a sweeper and other classmates laughed loudly.”

Laxmi: “Did you taunt him telling something?”

Arvind: “No mama. He is jealous of me since I am the topper of the examinations. He has failed for some subjects and the teachers scolded him whereas I was praised by all teachers. That might be the reason why he simply called me son of the sweeper.”

Laxmi: “You are right, dear son. What to do? God has created us poor, while they are born rich.”

Arvind: “Mama can’t you try some other job so that we can live with pride and avoid such abuse from the society?”

Laxmi: “In our State we can’t get any other job, dear son. Let us pray to God to allow us to live with peace and happiness.”

Arvind: “Okay mama. God will save us.”

One day as Laxmi was sweeping the temple by pass road around 8 am, she found a child being chased by a group of stray dogs. The boy about six years old was crying loudly and running. Laxmi ran towards the boy and picked him up from the dogs’ attack. Hearing the scream of the child, his father dashed out of his gate. Meanwhile the dogs bit on both the legs of Laxmi. Seeing the child’s father running towards the dogs they ran away. The child’s father took the child from Laxmi and handed over to his wife. He told Laxmi: “Thanks a lot. Kindly wait here. I will bring my car and then take you to the hospital.” He then started his car and took Laxmi to the government hospital. She was given a few anti rabies injections after dressing her wounds. She was then brought back to his house. The child’s father, Salim and his wife, Subaida thanked Laxmi for saving their child.

Subaida: “What’s your name?”

Laxmi: “My name is Laxmi, madam.”

Subaida: “Laxmi, we don’t know how to express our gratitude to you for saving our child. Had you not been there and picked up our child he would have died.”

Salim: “You can ask anything from us as a reward for your saviour act.”

Laxmi: “Sir, I know who you are. Can you give me an employment in your sweets factory? I and my family are fed up of this dirty profession of a sweeper. I am only a contingent worker and any moment the municipality can terminate my service. Moreover the salary I get is very low.”

Salim: “What’s your educational qualification?”

Laxmi: “I have passed 12<sup>th</sup> standard, sir.”

Salim: “I shall appoint you as an accountant in my factory. Your salary will be Rs. 30000. If you are pleased with it you can join tomorrow itself.”

Laxmi: “I am immensely happy at it, sir. God will shower upon you more and more blessings for saving me and our family. Let me go to the municipal office now and tell them that I am terminating my service as to join in your factory.”

Thus Laxmi joined as an accountant in the ‘Arabian Sweet Factory’. God has heeded to hers and her family’s prayers and saved her from the filthy life of a sweeper.

Two days later the Municipality organised a meeting in the evening to honour Laxmi for her brave act. The Municipal Chairman and the Secretary praised the rare bravery shown by Laxmi. They also lauded the service sweepers render to the society and requested the people to be kind and considerate to sweepers who sacrifice their wants and wishes to make the life of the society more comfortable and happy. The Chairman presented a cheque of Rs. 10,000 to Laxmi. Salim was present on the stage and he donated a cheque of Rs. 50,000 to Laxmi. The entire audience stood up and clapped.

## 19

### Postman

Sivakumar is a GDS (Gramin Dak Sevak) serving as a postman in a head post office in Kerala. He joined the postal department as a GDS employee since there were no direct recruitments to the permanent posts. He is now 52 and has already completed 32 years of service. He has no monthly salary but only allowances and he draws only 22000 per month whereas the permanent staffs of his age in the post office draw more than one lakh rupees. Moreover he will get no pension except a gratuity of around 1.5 lakh rupees when he retires at the age of 65. Even though the maximum working hours assigned to him is only five hours, he works more than eight hours beginning from 9 am. After sorting out the mails arrived in the post office, he goes out on his scooter carrying the heavy load of parcels and letters. He has to deliver to innumerable houses and institutions, letters, parcels (weighing up to 10 kg), pension money to old pensioners who can't travel to the treasury, give money through portable ATM and also several money orders. There are several thousands of GDS like him working in more than 5000 post offices spread all over Kerala with the expectation that one day or other they will be absorbed into the permanent posts. Due to the computerisation in the postal department several permanent posts have been abolished and one has to wait several years for one's promotion to the permanent post.

Kerala is a State which has six months monsoon and six months summer. Exposed to incessant rains and extreme heat



Sivakumar visits houses after houses and several institutions in the town. The visit of a postman is always a pleasant experience to the household because he is a harbinger of love, dreams and happiness between husbands and wives, parents and children, between brothers and sisters, between lovers and friends etc. The only happiness of the profession Sivakumar feels is when he finds the smiles on the faces of the addressees. The beam of joy appearing on the faces of the recipients of money orders makes Sivakumar elate of the service he has been rendering to the society. He is a model postman most loved and respected by the entire people of the village. Though educated only 10<sup>th</sup> class he exhibits the scholarship of a graduate since he is a voracious reader of informative books. Thus he is not just a postman to the village but a guide and teacher to the illiterate people there. He used to take classes for the illiterate in the evenings as part of the literacy programme of the government. Though he is happy and content during his duties, when he reaches home in the evening, wounding thoughts visit his mind like a battalion. He has no house of his own and lives in a rented house with his wife and two children. The monthly rent of his house is Rs. 8000. His wife is the homemaker and has no income. His sons are studying for engineering degrees, B Tech. and M Tech. Since they are very bright in their studies they could get admission in the colleges in the merit quota paying only fewer fees. Sivakumar with his meagre income struggled a lot to meet the domestic and education expenses. Thanks to the education loans given by the nationalised banks, the tuition fees were given to the institutions by the banks themselves. But the hostel fees and the travel expenses of the children had to be met from Sivakumar's income.

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Before two decades when telephones were not widely used in India, telegraph was the fastest mode of communication and postmen had to serve telegrams to the houses. Since it was very

expensive, telegrams were sent only to communicate very urgent and serious messages. Unlike a postman bringing a letter, handing over a telegram to the addressee was a moment of anxieties. Since the message was in English and in very brief words, the illiterate parents would request the postman to open it and read it out to them. Once when Sivakumar entered his house late after his duty, his wife Suseela asked him, “Why are you so late today? What happened to you? You look very sullen.”

Sivakumar: “I had to serve a telegram to a mother. She is illiterate in English and so she asked me to read it out. I conveyed her the sad news that her son Ajmal died. Ajmal was serving as a BSF soldier at Assam. Hearing it the mother cried loudly and fell unconscious. There was none else in the house and I called for the help of the neighbours to take her in an auto rickshaw to the hospital. I too accompanied them. Her BP had gone down and she was given some medicine and recovered after an hour. I paid the bills in the hospital. Meanwhile her daughter who was married and settled in the town was informed about the tragedy and she came to the hospital along with her husband. They took the crying mother to their house. It is to be assumed that Ajmal died in the confrontation with the terrorists. His body may be brought here for the burial.” Sivakumar ended the narrative with a sigh.

Suseela: “What a cruel fate! How many valiant sons have sacrificed their lives for our country! Innumerable parents and wives and children have lost their dear ones. They are all destined to live in never ending agony. You have done a great service dear, by taking the mother to the hospital immediately and saving her life. God will reward us for all the services you have been rendering to the society.”

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Years have passed and Sivakumar is going to enter into his sixtieth year. The postmaster and his colleagues have decided to

celebrate Sivakumar's birthday in a grand manner in the Municipal town hall. They approached the Municipal chairman and expressed their desire. The chairman was very happy to grant the hall and he was ready to inaugurate the function. The arrangements were made for a public programme of honouring Sivakumar on a Sunday and invitations were sent to the important persons of the town. In addition, an open invitation to the public was made through the newspapers.

Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023. The Municipal town hall was well decorated with lights and flowers. The hall was full with nearly 500 people. The meeting started at 5 pm. On the dais were seated the chief guest--the District Collector, the municipal chairman, Head postmaster and Sivakumar. All the dignitaries spoke in praise of the selfless service Sivakumar has been rendering to the society for long forty years. The Head postmaster in his speech spoke about the huge work postmen and postwomen are assigned with and how little the GDS have been paid by the government. Even though so many petitions have been submitted to the government, their humble demand for hike in the salary could not be granted. The postmaster then complemented Sivakumar telling that he is the gem of his post office. He also added that Sivakumar's name was proposed to the Kerala State government for the current year's Dak Sewa Award. He then asked if anyone in the audience wants to felicitate Sivakumar. A well dressed senior citizen stood up and raised his hand. He was invited to the stage and he started speaking:

"I am P. S. Krishnan, a retired railway officer. I am indebted to Shri. Sivakumar for what I am now. Long thirty years back when I was attending my mother who was critically ill in the city hospital, Sivakumar came there to hand over a registered letter to me. He had to travel 50 kilometres by bus to reach the hospital. The letter was my appointment order to the railway department as a clerk and I was requested to join the next day. He

understood from the print on the envelope that it would be an appointment order and didn't wait for a moment to find me out. It is the highest service a postman could do." The entire audience stood up and clapped for a minute.

Sivakumar in his reply speech thanked all dignitaries on the stage for their sweet words on him. He continued: "I am immensely grateful to dear Postmaster sir and my colleagues for arranging such a function to honour me. I could accomplish my duty well only because of the great support I have got from them. Krishnan sir has mentioned that he is indebted to me. I and my family are highly indebted to him. When my elder son Rahul, after his post graduation, got an opportunity to get an employment in the UK we had no money to pay for the visa and the tickets. Since Krishnan sir, after our meeting in the hospital, was in regular contact with me and offered to help me whenever I needed, I sought his help for my son and he gladly gave me one lakh rupees. Rahul got the appointment in the UK and gets high salary now. How can I forget the benevolence of Krishnan sir?" The audience applauded. "Since I am now sixty and the family can survive without my income, my wife and sons want me to end my postal service. But I told them that I would get no happiness sitting idle in the house. On the contrary I find bliss in serving the people in my capacity as a postman. Even though there is no pension, I will retire only at 65." There was another great applause from the audience. Sivakumar then thanked the audience and the village people for their kind cooperation in his service and ended his speech. The meeting ended with the national anthem.

## 20

### **Savitri and her child**

“Let me open the door of my memory!” Prof. Laxman said aside reclining in a rocking chair. At his seventy fifth year when he opened the door he found that the memories inscribed in his mind have become a palimpsest. He could recollect only very few incidents of his childhood and youth. Naturally those incidents and experiences that struck deep into his mind could not be erased by those myriads of involvements he had every day. The memory that dashed front was that of Savitri and her child. Where are they now?

Prof. Laxman's mind flashed back to the day he met Savitri and her child sitting on the railway track. He was returning home in the evening after his college duty. Noticing the alarming sight of a pretty young lady with a child of six or seven sitting on the railway track, Laxman stopped his car and got down. It is time for the Jan Shadabdi Express to pass through. He ran to the railway track and requested the lady to move away from the track with her child. She was reluctant to move and told that she did not want to live. Prof. Laxman pulled her up and forced her and the child a little away from the track. Immediately the train dashed away with the terrible sound of its horn.

“Why didn't you allow me to die?” the lady started crying.

Prof. Laxman: “Calm down. Suicide attempt is punishable. I am not reporting or handing over you to the police. Death is not a solution for any problem. Get into my car. You might be

hungry. We shall go to a restaurant and speak. You can trust me. I am Prof. Laxman, working in a college nearby.”

The lady and the child got into the car and Prof. Laxman drove the car to a nearby restaurant. He ordered tea and snacks for the lady and the child.

Prof. Laxman: “Now tell me who you are and your whereabouts and the reason for your suicide attempt.”

“Sir, I am Savitri and this is my daughter, Poornima. We are coming from Kasargod. We got down from the train at that station and walked along the tracks waiting for a train to end our lives. My husband is a painter by profession and he is a drunkard. He used to beat me and the child every night when he returned home heavily drunk. He never gave any money to meet the household expenditure. Hence I had to work in a plywood factory. There is his mother in our house who rather than supporting me and saving me and the child from husband’s abuses and slaps, encouraged him to torture us more. I had no peace of mind and happiness in my life from the very day I started living with him.” She started crying.

Prof. Laxman: “Calm down, Savitri! Was there any reason for your husband and mother-in-law to quarrel with you? I mean anything which they find fault in your character or conduct?”

Savitri: “They both are highly superstitious. They believe in horoscope and they have found out that my husband Laxman’s stars did not match with mine. They even accuse that I have ‘chovva dosham’. If any silly tragic events like fever occurred in the house, my ‘chovva dosham’ was responsible for it. To make things worse, contrary to their expectation of me giving birth to a male baby, I gave birth to this my daughter. Again they found ‘chovva dosham’ in the horoscope of the daughter. In fact my mother-in-law and husband wanted to get rid of me and my daughter and bring a new bride to the house. Mother-in-law

quarrelled with me almost every day and asked my husband to dispose me and my daughter somewhere. And he too threatened us to desert us while he quarrelled and beat us.” Tears flowed like a stream over her cheeks.

Poornima: “These are the marks of beats my dad did. And these are the marks he burnt with cigarettes.” She showed such marks on her legs and hands and started crying.

Prof. Laxman wiped tears of the child and said: “Don’t cry Poornima. Your dad will never torture you and your mom. You are not going back to your house. I will make arrangements for your peaceful happy life somewhere. Savitri, do you want to go back to your house?”

Savitri: “Never sir, they will kill us if we stay there. That’s why we left the house to end our lives.”

Prof. Laxman: “Okay, you need not go there. I have a plan to shelter you in a convent at Trivandrum. The Provincial of that convent, Sr. Nirmala is my friend and neighbour. We will go there and make a request to her. I will bear all the expenditure for your accommodation there. Poornima will be sent to a school run by the convent. Savitri can help the sisters in the household activities. Before going there we have to report to the police station here and seek their permission. The Circle Inspector of the police station here is my classmate. He will definitely help us. This is needed in case your husband or his relatives file a case of you both missing. If you want we can file a case against your husband for torturing you and the child. He will surely be imprisoned.”

Savitri: “No need of it, sir. We don’t want to take revenge against him. The only thing we want is that we should not be compelled to live with him and his mother.”

Prof. Laxman: “Alright. We will inform the police your humble request. Kindly wait here for five minutes. I will go to

the telephone booth to tell my wife that I will be late in returning home.”

Prof. Laxman paid the restaurant bill and went to the telephone booth adjacent to the building. He rang to his house and told his wife a lie that he had to urgently go to Trivandrum to visit a friend of his who was admitted in the medical college. After the phone call he returned to the restaurant.

Prof. Laxman: “Now we shall go to the police station and meet the Circle Inspector. Kindly get into the car.”

Laxman drove the car to the police station and met the Circle Inspector. The Circle Inspector Stephen Joseph was very happy to meet his old classmate and listened to the entire narrative of Savitri which led them to come over there. To Laxman’s suggestion that Savitri and the child would be sheltered in the convent at Trivandrum, Stephen extended his full support.

Prof. Laxman then drove the car to Trivandrum. It took two hours and thirty minutes to reach there. The car stopped before the convent. Laxman along with Savitri and the child entered into the compound and rang calling the bell. A Sister opened the front door.

Prof. Laxman: “We would like to meet Provincial Sister Nirmala.”

Sister: “Kindly tell me who you are.”

Prof. Laxman: “I am Prof. Laxman, from Chengannur. I am Sister Nirmala’s friend and neighbour.”

Sister: “Kindly sit here. I will call Provincial Mother.”

Within a minute Sister Nirmala arrived and she was delighted to meet her friend and neighbour, Laxman. Prof.



Laxman told her the entire story of Savitri and the purpose of their visit.

Sr. Nirmala: "Savitri and her daughter can live here as long as they want. Since you have met the police and got the permission, there is nothing to be worried of."

Prof. Laxman: "Thanks a lot dear Sister. How much do you need for their accommodation? I will give you every month."

Sr. Nirmala: "If you can give Rs. 5000 we can manage with it. We will send Poornima to our school here."

Prof. Laxman: "Very kind of you, dear Sister. Here, take this Rs. 5000. I will send you money order every month." He gave Rs. 5000 to the Sister.

Prof. Laxman bade goodbye to them.

Savitri: "Inexpressible is my gratitude to you, Sir. You are really our saviour. Had you not met us at the railway tracks we would not have lived." She and the daughter folded their palms. Tears of happiness were flowing on Savitri's cheeks.

Prof. Laxman got into the car and drove back to his house. He reached home around 12.30 night. He decided to not tell the actual story to his wife. He took the policy, 'When you give, do not let your left hand know.'

Prof. Laxman sent the money order of Rs. 5000 regularly without fail. Once in three months or so he called Sr. Nirmala and enquired about the well being of Savitri and Poornima.

Years and years went thus. After some ten years Sr. Nirmala sent a letter to Prof. Laxman requesting him not to send any more money. Since Savitri was doing great service to the convent it is their duty to look after her and the child free of cost.

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Prof. Laxman searched his mind to find out the year he met Savitri and the child at the railway track. It was long back twenty three years. Very few rich people had mobile phones at that time and he too didn't have one. He was then teaching in a college at Chengannur. He lived with his wife and two children in a house not far away from the college. His mind was trying to deviate from the focus of Savitri. It is very difficult to tie the mind to a certain point for much time. Mind is the most mischievous being in the world. Laxman somehow reined the mind to the meeting of Savitri and the developments after that. He longed to meet her and the child. Where are they now? Are they still in the convent? Poornima must be around thirty now. For the past ten years he had no contact with Sr. Nirmala. She might have retired and would be resting there at Trivandrum or in some other convents.

Time has made much change in Prof Laxman's life as well. He retired from service twenty years back. His son and daughter became doctors and are married and settled in the States. They visit him once in a year or so. Laxman was leading a happy life with his wife, Sumathi. But most unfortunately she departed him forever, leaving him all alone, two years back. She died of cardiac arrest. Laxman's children wanted to bring him to the States and stay with them, but his mind doesn't allow him to leave the place he was born and sheltered. He is not very healthy now. He is a diabetic patient and has also asthmatic complaints.

Prof. Laxman's voyage through the golden days of his past was blocked by the sound of calling bell. He went and opened the front door. A well dressed beautiful lady was there.

"Laxman Sir, do you recognise me? You have met me when I was six years old." The lady said.

Prof. Laxman: "Sorry, I can't recollect."

Lady: "Long twenty three years back you met me and my mother at a railway track and saved our lives."

Prof. Laxman: “Poornima?”

Lady: “Yes sir, I am that Poornima. I owe my life to you. I am at present a medical officer in the Taluk Hospital here.”

Prof. Laxman: “O my God! What a surprise! Your face has changed a lot. Be seated here. “Where is your mother?”

Poornima sat on a chair and replied: “She is no more, sir. She left the world three years back. She died of cancer.” Her eyes were filled with tears.

Prof. Laxman: “Very sad to hear. Calm down! I had no information about you for the past thirteen years. Kindly tell me what happened during this period.”

Poornima: “The convent at Trivandrum where we stayed, educated me. As I was very bright in studies the Sisters sent me for MBBS. Once I completed the course I got appointment in a primary health centre and the convent allowed me to stay with my mother in a rented house near to the hospital. I was also permitted to use the salary I get for our expenditure and need not give any money to the convent. I could get admission for MD with a scholarship and we stayed there in a rented house near to the medical college. After the MD I got appointment as a medical practitioner in the district hospital at Kollam. My mother died when I was working there. She had cancer in her abdomen.”

Prof. Laxman: “What a sad end! Are you married or alone?”

Poornima: “I am alone, sir. In fact, mentally I am not alone. I have placed you as my father from the very day you saved us. If you permit me, I would continue to see you as my father and do you services and duties as a daughter does. Let me stay with you in this house as you are alone? I have learnt that your children are abroad and settled with their families there. There is nobody

to look after you here. If you and your children allow I can stay here in this house. I will give you rent for my stay.”

Prof. Laxman: “Poornima, I can’t believe what you say. I am immensely happy to have you as my daughter in my house. My children won’t object to, I am sure. Will you live with me till I die or desert me when you are transferred?”

Poornima: “Never, dad. I will be in touch with you wherever I am. Usually we get transfer to nearby hospitals and I will be able to go for duties from this house.”

Prof. Laxman: “Great! God has sent you here at the right moment when I need other’s help. Might be it is the result of my svatik karma. Come daughter, let me bless you.”

Poornima came close to Prof. Laxman and he kissed on her forehead and she embraced him.

## 21

### Narendran's Destiny

“Dad, the postman has served a registered letter addressed to you.” Swapna handed over the envelope to her father Narendran, lying on his bed. He opened the cover and went through the content.

“It is from the bank again. If we don't remit the loan dues of Rs. 5,25,582 by the end of this month the bank will confiscate our house and property which we had pledged.” Narendran said in a sad tone.

Hearing this Narendran's wife Rekha arrived from the kitchen. “O my God, what shall we do? Where will we go if they evict us?” she wailed.

“I have no answer. We have to take it as an ultimatum from the bank since they had already served reminders earlier. They won't grant us any extension of the date to remit the amount. They will be coming with police force and vehicle to carry all our possessions in the house and shut us out and lock the door and paste the notice that reads as bank would be the owner of the house and property.” Narendran replied.

“Shall we write to the chief minister pleading for the government mercy to write off the loan amount?” Swapna suggested.

“It is of no use, dear daughter. There are thousands of defaulters like us in the State and the government won't take the burden of remitting these amounts to the banks. Since the bank

is a nationalised one the State government can't enforce it to write off the amount." Narendran replied.

"Since you aren't able to walk I shall go to the bank tomorrow and request the manager to show mercy upon us. The amount we have to pay is very negligible for a bank and the manager may write it off." Rekha suggested.

"I don't think the manager can take such a decision because it is public money. There are instances of writing off when the borrower is no more—committed suicide or died in an accident or of some fatal disease. In such cases the director board of the bank will decide if the loan amount is to be written off and avoid confiscation of the property. That is the only option before us to save you." Narendran uttered with a sigh.

"What nonsense are you speaking? If you dare to do so, the next moment we will come with you." Rekha cried.

"Dad, don't keep such negative thoughts in your mind. Anyway fifteen more days are there for the bank to take action. Let mama go to the bank and plead for mercy. If it is futile we shall inform this situation to our relatives and request them to save us. If they are merciful the amount can be amassed and remitted in the bank." Swapna suggested.

"Okay daughter, we shall do so." Narendran replied.

Narendran is a farmer by profession. He has one acre of land with a small house in it where he lives with his wife and daughter. Daughter Swapna is now studying for B. Ed course in the government college. Narendran's wife Rekha is a housewife. Swapna had a younger brother who died in a bike accident three years back. Narendran took a loan of Rs. 3 lakhs from a nationalised bank four years before for the purpose of banana cultivation in his own land. Unfortunately there was a cyclone which felled all the banana trees with tender bunches and Narendran could not repay the loan amount with capital and

interest at the due date. As Shakespeare says, “When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions” Narendran’s son died in the bike accident which made the family drowned in the ocean of eternal sorrow. To make things worse Narendran became a diabetic patient and a wound on his right leg became septic and the leg had to be amputated.

As to sustain the family Rekha was compelled to serve as a maid in several houses. Meanwhile the loan amount in the bank grew up day by day adding interest upon interest. Reminder notices to close the loan were served from time to time.

As decided Rekha went to the bank and told the manager their helplessness in closing the loan. The manager in reply told his helplessness in taking a decision to write off the loan amount. He added that he has to abide by the rules and laws of the bank or else he will lose his job. Letters were sent to the immediate relatives of Narendran and Swapna pleading for their mercy to avoid confiscation of the house and the property. There were sympathetic responses from the relatives but only an offer of less than Rs. 20,000 came.

At last the doomsday arrived. On the first of December arrived at Narendran’s house the bank’s car with the manager and two section clerks escorted by a police jeep carrying three policemen. The manager knocked at the front door of the house. Rekha opened the door. The manager told her that they have come to confiscate the property and evict them from the house. Rekha started crying loudly: “Please don’t send us out, sir. We have nowhere to go...” Swapna also started crying and pleaded the manager to show mercy upon them. Narendran approaching on his wheel chair begged for compassion. Hearing the loud cry the neighbours came there. One among them, a man of sixty, and well dressed, introduced himself as Akbar and asked the manager what for they have come. The manager told him about the debt Narendran has to remit to avoid the confiscation.

Akbar asked Narendran: “Have you got any amount to remit to the bank?”

Narendran: “Dear Akbar, you know, we have no income and we survive with what Rekha get’s as a maid. I had requested my relatives to help me but they could only give Rs. 19,000. This is that amount.” He showed bundle of the currencies in his hand.

Akbar: “Manager sir, how much is the amount to be remitted?”

Manager: “It is Rs. 5,25,582. The loan was taken some four years back. The capital amount is Rs. 3 lakhs. Seeing the pathetic situation of this house the director board has decided to waive the interest. So the capital amount of Rs. 3 lakhs has to be paid now as to avoid the confiscation.”

Akbar: “I am not only the neighbour of Narendran but also his classmate till the 10<sup>th</sup> standard. Since he was not rich enough to go to college for higher studies he turned to agriculture helping his father. I could complete my graduation and then got a good job in Kuwait. It is my duty to save him and his family. Kindly wait for five minutes. Let me take my cheque book from my house.”

Akbar went to his house and returned within five minutes. He handed over a bearer cheque of Rs. 3 lakhs to Narendran and asked him to give it to the manager. With tears flowing over the cheeks, Narendran accepted the cheque leaf telling: “Dear Akbar, you are an angel sent by God to save me. I don’t know how to express our gratitude. God bless you dear friend!” Rekha and Swapna clasped their palms weeping in joy.

Narendran handed over the cheque to the bank manager who checked it closely and found it valid. It was of the same bank. The papers related to the closing of the loan was served to Narendran and got his signatures wherever needed. The



manager, the escort team and the neighbours praised Akbar for his generosity. He shook the hand of Akbar and said: “A friend in need is a friend indeed and you have proved that maxim through your humane action, dear Akbar.” All applauded hearing this. The manager and others went back. The neighbours also went back to their houses.

Akbar told Narendran: “You could have told me of this crisis earlier. I would have helped you. I am going back to Kuwait next Sunday. Keep this money with you.” He gave cash of Rs. 10,000 to Narendran’s hands. “You can call me anytime you like. This is my card. Don’t forget to inform me when you come across any financial burden.” He handed over the visiting card to Narendran and moved away. Narendran, Rekha and Swapna were dumfounded and bade him goodbye with clasped palms.

## 22

### Vikas the butcher

Vikas is a slaughterer living with his family in a village in Haryana State, India. He kills goats and sells meat to maintain his family. In front of his house is the shop where he sells meat. It is a hereditary profession done by his father and grandfather. Vikas has his wife Pooja and two daughters Priya and Ritu studying in 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> standards in a government school not far away from their house.

Vikas' parents taught him till 10<sup>th</sup> class and wanted to save their son from their family profession and get an employment in some government offices or private factories. But since unemployment is a major concern in the country Vikas was compelled to follow his father's footprint to sustain his family. His father died of heart failure when Vikas was only 20. Thus the responsibility of looking after his mother and two younger sisters fell on his shoulder. Vikas is now 45 and he married Priya when he was only 29. He somehow managed to make sufficient money from the slaughter business and married off his sisters. His mother is living with him.

Since there aren't any slaughter shops in the village Vikas could make a large income from the business. He has a good bank balance which he reserves for the higher education of his daughters and their marriages. To be honest, Vikas doesn't like his profession. In fact he is not a hard hearted man to see a goat's throat cut and bleeds. The killing process is done by his assistants and he will hide himself in the shop when the butcher process takes place in the shed attached to it. He will even shut his ears to avoid the death cry of the goats. He could never eat

the meat of goats that were killed in his shop. He is a vegetarian and so are his family members. The bleats of the goats agonised his family members a lot. One evening when the family members sat for their supper there was a discussion regarding this:

Pooja: “Dear hubby, why don’t you stop this horrible job? We have sufficient money in the bank to meet our daily expenses. Moreover, if you can’t sit idle you can work in our agricultural land behind our house. That way we can earn some income. We can save the money given to the farm labourers.”

Priya: “Yes dad, it bleeds my heart when I hear the death cry of the goats. Moreover, some of my classmates annoy me calling me butcher’s daughter. Other students’ fathers do honourable jobs and they are happy. Kindly stop this atrocious business, dear dad.”

Ritu: “I too am laughed at by some classmates calling me butcher’s daughter. I feel like crying when I hear the bleats of the goats. We shall stop this abominable butcher, dear dad.”

Mother: “Dear son, there is sense in what they say. This butcher job is never a pleasant work. Out of necessity only our family had to continue this despicable job. Now that we have other source to live, we shall stop it and redeem respect to our family.”

Vikas: “I can understand your feelings. I shall think of stopping this profession by next year. As you know, though odious, this job gives us good income every day. For the marriage our daughters we need to save large amount. They are to be sent to rich families where there will be no deficiencies of anything. Kindly bear till the end of this year. You need to tolerate only six more months.” All were happy hearing the decision of Vikas.

The next day when a large buck was going to be killed, it somehow saved its life from the knife and dashed to the road in front of the shop. Vikas and the assistants ran after it. Suddenly a

truck passed through the road and hit Vikas who fell unconscious with head bleeding. The goat had already crossed the road and ran away. The truck stopped immediately and the driver and the assistants took Vikas to the government hospital in the town. Vikas was admitted to the ICU. Under the check-up and scanning it was found that there was not any damage to the brain except a deep wound on the right side of the head. Vikas' consciousness was regained after an hour. Meanwhile his wife and children came in a taxi car to the hospital bursting out in tears. The doctor told them that the injury was a minor one and there was nothing to be worried of. Vikas had to stay in the hospital for two days.

Vikas couldn't sleep well in the nights. He was haunted by terrible nightmares. The goats he had butchered swarmed around him bleating loudly. It seemed to him that they were all cursing him telling that this accident was a punishment for killing them mercilessly. Many a times he cried aloud in the sleep and the nurse who attended him asked what had happened. He said that it was a bad dream. The nurse asked him to pray to God to grant him good sleep.

Vikas was discharged from the hospital on the third day. He was found very sullen and dispirited. Though the injury part of the head was bandaged he had no pain of it. His mother, wife and children tried to make him happy.

Mother: "Dear Vikas, we have to thank God for saving your life. Are you worried about the goat lost?"

Vikas: "No, mama. I am not at all worried about the goat that was lost. Rather I am relieved now that it had not been killed by the truck."

Pooja: "Then why are you so moody and sad?"

Vikas: "I have lost all peace of mind. I am not able to sleep at all. When sleep descends on me, those goats I had butchered appear to me in nightmare and start cursing me. Startling, I get

up with shrieks. I have decided to do some penance for my crimes against those animals. Kindly allow me to give up this butcher business and serve free as an assistant in a gaushala (cow shelter) in the neighbouring village. If the management permits I will serve the cows there during the day time and return in the evening to spend with you in the night. I want to do this service for minimum two years and I believe that this service will wash away the sins I have committed.

Priya: “Excellent decision dear dad! The Buddha teaches us that living animals could be our relatives, mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, children, friends in our past rebirths. Thus torturing, killing, eating animals is like doing that to our own family and kith and kin. Dad, you have done a lot of crimes by killing innocent goats and you have to repent and do penance for it, or you won’t get salvation as the Buddha says.”

Pooja: “There is much sense in what Priya says. I too think that all other beings on earth have equal right to live here as humans and we have no right to kill them unless they are threats to our existence. As your conscience requests, kindly serve in the gaushala, dear hus. Fortunately we have sufficient money in the bank to meet our daily expenses. Kindly stop the butcher job for ever. Give some money to your assistants. Let them find some job and live.”

Mother: “I give you full consent, dear son. Go and serve the poor creatures and thus save your soul from damnation.”

Vikas: “I am very happy now. I had the apprehension that you all would object to my decision. Tomorrow itself I will visit the gaushala and seek permission to serve them.”

Accordingly Vikas visited the gaushala the next day. It is about ten kilometers from his house. The manager of the cow shelter was excited to hear about the decision of Vikas to do voluntary service to their shelter. Thus Vikas started his service there on that day itself. He could sleep well in his house with sweet dreams.

## 23

### **If there is a will...**

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024. World Book Day. The government school of the town is celebrating the day with a meeting presided over by the District Collector. Nearly 500 students from the first standard to the 12<sup>th</sup> standard are assembled in the auditorium. Along with the Collector, the principal and the school leader are seated on the stage. The principal in her welcome address, requested the Collector to kindly motivate the students.

The District Collector, Ganesh Kumar, only 28 years old, is one of the top rankers in the Civil Services Examinations. He started his presidential address in a friendly style of communicating with the students. After speaking on what World Book Day means he asked the audience if anyone has read Shakespeare's plays. There was no response from the students. Then he asked if anyone has recently read fictions. None raised hands or stood up. The collector continued his enquiry:

“Tell me frankly, how many of you chat over your mobile phones or play video games in it in your houses. Kindly raise your hands.”

The entire audience raised their hands.

Ganesh Kumar continued: “It is not unusual that you are all using your mobile phones. In this digital world we can't think of a day without out using our mobile phones. Being students if you are using mobile phones for educative or informative purposes it is not wastage of time whereas if you are spending your invaluable time for meaningless chatting, phone calls and

video games, your life is spoiled. It happened to me when I was a student. Principal Madam, can I take some ten more minutes?"

"Surely Sir, you may take as much time as you like. Our students are eager to listen to your precious words," the principal replied.

"Okay, thanks," the Collector continued: "I am the only child of my parents who are doctors by profession. Whatever I wanted, they provided me. I was very bright in my studies and teachers liked me very much. Naturally my classmates were envious of me. I had only a few friends and under their bad influence I was tempted to use drugs which they procured through some drug sellers. This happened when I was studying for my 11<sup>th</sup> standard. Neither the teachers nor my parents were aware of our drug use. I have been using mobile phone in my house which my dad bought for me when I insisted. The use of drugs diverted my attention from my studies and the teachers started to note my changes. I performed poorly in the class test papers. The teachers asked me what was wrong with me and if I had been using drugs. I told them that I had no problems and I had never used any drugs. The class teacher phoned to my parents about my disinterest in studies. Being doctors, both dad and mom were in the hospitals and they reached home only in the night. I have been all alone in my house and I spent most my time using my mobile phone—chatting with my friends, playing video games and even watching movies. One evening when my mom came back home I was watching a movie. She was very furious and started scolding me for my poor performance in the studies. She told me that I would never be permitted to use the mobile phone till the school was closed for summer vacation. She asked me to give her the phone but I didn't give. She then tried to snatch the phone from my hands. In my anger I pushed her forcefully and her head hit on the wall and she fell down unconscious. Crying loudly 'sorry mummy' I tried to lift her but

I couldn't. I became very upset. I phoned to my dad who was still in the hospital. Dad came immediately and took mom to the hospital along with me. Surprisingly he didn't scold me or beat me for the offence I had done. The reason might be that I was very repentant and tears were flowing over my cheeks. Fortunately there was no injury to the brain and mom was discharged the next day.

When mom regained her consciousness in the hospital, I clasped her feet with both my hands and begged for her pardon:

"Kindly forgive me, mummy. Pardon me, papa." I started sobbing. "I promise you both that henceforth I will be your worthy son fulfilling all what you desire. I will no more use any drugs. Similarly unless you permit, I won't use my mobile phone. You can keep it in your custody."

"Very good, son, our worries are over now. We have no grudge to you." Telling this mom embraced me.

"We are highly pleased, my son. Kindly keep up your promises." Papa kissed on my forehead.

"So it was a turning point in my life and total conversion took place in me." Ganesh Kumar continued his speech. "I kept away from my bad friends. Concentrated more on my studies and became top in the class. I passed my Pre-Degree examinations with 95% marks. Then joined for BA Economics and passed the degree with high distinction. Then I completed my post-graduation with high marks. After that I prepared for Civil Service Examinations and passed in the first attempt itself. I got the tenth rank." The Collector paused for a while and then asked:

"Dear students, what message have you received from my life story? One of you kindly come over here and tell the audience."



A boy sitting on the front bench stood up and came forward to the stage. The Collector handed over the mike to him and he spoke loudly: "The message we get is IF THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY."

"Exactly, that is the message I would like to impart to you. If you have a will like mine, you can become greater persons than I am. Be role models to others. You shall never use drugs and agonise your family, teachers, friends and society as such, besides killing yourself. Limit use of your mobile phones. Use it only for your educative purposes. Wish you all success in your studies!" The Collector ended his speech.

## 24

### Who is to be blamed?

“Mama, our class is making a tour to Mysore-Bangalore-Ooty on 29<sup>th</sup> of this month. Our entire classmates are going. We also want to go with them,” Bindu told her mother Saritha.

“Yes mama, please request papa to grant us the permission,” Salim supported Bindu.

“How much is the charge?” Saritha asked.

“Only two thousand rupees per student. It is a three day tour,” Salim replied

“Four thousand rupees is a huge amount for us, dear children. We are poor people and we earn our livelihood through the daily wages your papa earns by working in the cardamom estate,” Saritha said.

“Mama, we have never gone for a tour and it is the last occasion we have got to go with our classmates. If there is no cash with papa now, let him borrow the amount from the estate owner whom he has been serving for many years. He can repay the amount by installments,” Bindu suggested.

“Okay, let papa come after the work. I shall tell him. Now you go and do your homework,” Saritha replied.

Bindu and Salim are the twin children of Saritha and her husband Majid. They are studying in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard in the nearby government school. Saritha and Majid belonging to Hindu and Muslim families loved each other and married

despite their families objected to. After the marriage since the parents didn't permit them to live in their houses Majid took a rented house not far away from Saritha's parents' house. Majid was a hardworking man and he could easily meet the expenditure of the house. The twins were born to them after a year of their marriage. Gradually the resentment that Saritha's parents had to her daughter dissolved and they gave 20 cents of their agricultural land to her. Majid could build a small house there with the money he earned through the daily labour. Fortunately, the State government granted him three lakhs rupees under the housing scheme for the poor. Majid and Saritha decided not to have any more children since their education and bringing up is a costly affair. Both Bindu and Salim are very bright students and they are the top rankers of the class. For that very reason they were the most favourites of the teachers.

Majid returned after his work in the evening and Saritha presented the matter of the tour to him. He went to the room where the children were studying and told them: "Mama told me that you both want to go for the excursion."

"Yes papa, we have never gone out of our State. This is a golden opportunity," Bindu replied.

"We will never get such an opportunity, dear papa," Salim added.

"Okay, you are granted permission. You may enroll the names to the class teacher. I will somehow amass the money needed for the tour. After all, your enjoyment and happiness is our happiness. Now, continue your studies," Majid said.

The tour day came and Majid accompanied Bindu and Salim to the school early morning for the see-off. There were some thirty students gathered there for the tour. Their parents were also present there to bid them farewell. The bus with the students started the journey at 7 am. Bidding them goodbye and

best wishes Majid returned to this house. After breakfast he went to the estate for his labour.

It was monsoon season. The season started late this year instead of the regular beginning in the first week of June. It is the end of July and it started raining heavily from the morning. Monsoon is always a nightmare for the people living in the high ranges. Landslides are regular catastrophes in many mountains and hills. In a thickly populated State like Kerala that is small in size, people are compelled to risk living in small houses on the slopes of the hills. When it is continuously raining in the night one can't sleep peacefully.

Majid returned home in the evening after his labour. Both Majid and Saritha felt the absence of their children in the house. It is for the first time that they are going to sleep without their children beside them. The rain continued uninterruptedly. The red alert of rain conveyed through the TV news worried Majid and Saritha and after the dinner they went for sleep.

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Majid and Saritha never dreamt that it was going to be their last sleep. The morning of 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024 broke out with the most tragic news of the series of landslides that occurred in the villages of Punjirimattom, Mundakkai, Chooralmala, and Vellarimala in Wayanad District of Kerala. Many government agencies such as the armed forces, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), fire and rescue services, and forest and wildlife authorities, as well as volunteers, launched a large-scale rescue mission to search for the survivors. It was reported that 420 people died, 397 people got injured and 118 people were missing. Seventeen entire families died. More than 1,555 houses and other buildings including schools, a dispensary, the panchayat bhawan, the electricity board office, and 136 community buildings were damaged. The landslides also

devastated a total of 600 hectares of land, including 310 hectares of farmland.

The house of Majid and Saritha was swept away in the torrent of water and mud and their bodies could not be traced out. Thus they were among the list of those who were missing. The tragic news shook the entire State and the country. Cancelling the further tour, the bus with the school students returned. There was an outburst of loud cries and wails from the students when they saw the devastated expanse of large areas where their houses existed. They were all crying for their parents and siblings. The volunteers led them all in the bus they came to the relief camps that were opened in the neighbouring village. Even the school they studied was also taken away by the waters.

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Professors Raveendran and his wife Sangeeta were viewing the tragic news of the landslides in the TV. They were deeply moved at the tragedy that befell to the poor victims. Both of them are professors in the department of English in the government college at Thiruvananthapuram. They are well settled and lead a very comfortable life. Unfortunately they have no children.

Watching the news, Prof. Sangeeta exclaimed: “Why is God so cruel to the poor? If they could afford to, those families would have lived comfortably in the low ranges rather than living in the ecologically sensitive areas. Who is to be blamed for this tragedy?”

Prof. Raveendran replied: “Why should you blame God? There are reasons for natural calamities. To great extent, man is responsible for such tragedies. God has never requested men to live on those hilly slopes. He created this bountiful planet and it can accommodate and feed all the human beings and other beings. God has never divided the land among the people. He

hasn't created division among the people—haves and have-nots or the rich and the poor. If those land owners in the low ranges shared their lands to the homeless poor people there would not have been any need to occupy the hilly forest areas, live there and invite such tragedies.”

Prof. Sangeeta: “Darling, you are talking about a utopian socialist society where all are equals. Man being selfish this idea won't be practical. In fact, the government could have dissuaded the people from living in those sensitive areas. Moreover it should find safe places where houses should be built for the homeless and job opportunities should be given to them for their survival.”

Prof. Raveendran: “You are right, dear. The state should be a welfare state. One main reason for the recent landslides is the deforestation and the innumerable quarries mining the rocky hills. The explosion from the quarries shakes the grip of the soil on the rocks. Government should definitely stop function of such quarries. Similarly there should be control over the construction of huge buildings under the resort mafia on the sensitive zones.”

Prof. Sangeeta: “Darling, look at the flash news moving along the videos of the landslide site. There are five children who have lost both their parents. Among them are the twins--a boy and a girl. Why don't we adopt them? It would be a great service and no doubt the children would make our future life full of happiness.”

Prof. Raveendran: “That is great idea, dear. At this age we can't expect to have our own children. We have undergone much treatment for it but that was of no use. We shall visit the relief camp at the earliest and make a request to the government authorities for the adoption. I hope there won't be much difficulty to get those children since none of their relatives would take the burden of looking after them as they are all poor people.

Before visiting the camp, let us contribute a good amount to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund for the rehabilitation activities."

Prof. Sangeeta: "I was about to tell you that, darling. Let us contribute one lakh rupees each from our salary account. We shall do it online now. We shall visit the relief camp next Sunday and make a request for the adoption."

Both of them remitted one lakh rupees each to the CMDRF through their mobile phones. As decided, they visited the camp the next Sunday. They made their request to the camp authorities and they showed them the twins—Bindu and Salim. Though they appeared very sad there was some charm on their faces. The professors longed to hug them but remained silent. Unless the formalities are over they can't own them.

The children remained in the camp for another week and they were given counselling as to regain their normal mental stage. After the psychological treatment for a week they could cope up with the reality. The professors visited the camp again and the teachers of the twins were present there. The teachers told Bindu and Salim that Prof. Raveendran and Prof. Sangeeta would be their father and mother and they would take them to their house at Thiruvananthapuram where they will continue their studies in a government school. Both Bindu and Salim were happy to hear this glad news. Thus all the formalities of the adoption being over, the professors took Bindu and Salim in their car to their house.

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*Note:* The story is a blend of imagination with historical facts.

## 25

### **Radha and Resmi**

Dr. Radha is a gynaecologist in the Government Medical College at Kottayam and her husband Dr. Prakash is a cardiologist working in the same hospital. They live in their house not far away from the hospital. They have a daughter named Twinkle, aged ten and a son named Suraj aged six. The children are studying in a public school at Kottayam itself. Resmi is the maid of the doctor family who comes for work early in the morning and leaves to her house in the evening. Resmi is a widow and has only a daughter, Shruti aged ten who studies in a government school near to their house. Resmi's husband was an auto rickshaw driver who lost his life two years back when a truck hit his rickshaw on a rainy day. Resmi has to look after her mother-in-law besides her daughter. Mother-in-law is a diabetic patient and can't go for any daily labour.

Resmi has been serving the doctor family for more than three years. Both Dr. Radha and her husband were very loving and compassionate to her. In fact they treated her as their own sister. When dined they compelled her to dine with them. In addition to the monthly salary of Rs. 25000 Resmi was given money for any emergency need like hospital expenses, for the purchase of new dresses for any functions or for gifts to be presented for weddings and other ceremonies. The beautiful house and the luxurious life of the doctor family haunt her very often in comparison to her poor house and way of life. But she then thanked God for giving her a chance to serve in their house and enjoy life that many of her same strata are not destined to.



“Resmi, what’s wrong with you today? You look very sad.”  
Dr. Radha asked her while cooking in the kitchen.

“Daughter, Shruti is not well, mam. For the last two days she has fever intermittently and she couldn’t go to school today. I have given her paracetamol tablets from time to time.”

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier? Without the prescription of a doctor you should not continue giving such tablets. Go to your house and take her to the medical college. Consult Dr. Prakash and he will give you the medicines. After her recovery only you need to come here for your work. Here, take these 2000 rupees. Take an auto rickshaw to your house and go to the hospital with the child in the same rickshaw.”

Resmi hired an autorickshaw at once and showed the daughter to Dr. Prakash. Shruti had to be admitted in the hospital since a course of medicine through drips had to be injected. She showed mild symptoms of pneumonia. Resmi stayed with the child. After three days Shruti was discharged.

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Years passed and Resmi continued serving the doctors family. Lives of both the families went smooth and happily. On holidays Resmi used to bring daughter Shruti to the doctors’ house. She felt like a member of the house. Both Radha and Prakash loved her like their own daughter, Twinkle who is studying for MBBS at Bangalore. Shruti is studying for B.Com in the government college at Kottayam.

One evening while helping the mother in the kitchen Shruti asked Resmi, “Mama, why it is that some are rich and others are poor in the world? Twinkle and her parents are rich and we are destined to serve them for our livelihood. Among the non human beings there is no such division as rich and poor. God, the creator looks after them all with no partiality to any species. The resources on the planet are for all and none keeps more than it needs.”

“The fault is not with the Creator, daughter. Man, uses his developed brain for negative thinking and becomes selfish. The division in the society as rich and poor arises out of man’s selfishness. This is the way of the world and this division will be there as long as human race is there. By the by, Dr. Radha has requested me to send you to some Public Service Commission coaching centre as to prepare for the PSC examinations for the government job vacancies. It is a six months course and the fees of Rs. 30000 will be paid by her. Classes are there on Saturdays and Sundays when you have no regular classes. You are in the final year of your degree course and before you complete the degree you can appear for the PSC examinations. What do you say?”

“I am only happy to go for it, mama. Some of my classmates have already joined the coaching classes. I want to get a job after my degree so that I can relieve you of the maid’s work.”

“In that case I shall tell Radha mam of your intention and you can join the centre at the earliest. Now go and have your bath. We shall have the supper then and you can continue your studies till we sleep.”

Shruti joined a good PSC coaching centre and attended its classes on Saturdays and Sundays. The coaching ended after six months. She applied for the PSC lower division clerk examination while she was attending the coaching classes and she was called for the written test before her final year degree examinations. It was for the various departments. Since Shruti was very studious she could perform well in the test. The degree examinations were also easy for her and its result came two months after the exams. She passed B.Com with 80% of marks. Both Shruti and Resmi were very happy at the result and shared their joy with the doctors. Dr. Radha presented Shruti an I-phone as a felicitation.

Their happiness was doubled when the result of the PSC test was announced and Shruti was listed as 9<sup>th</sup> in the rank list. Within a week Shruti was called for the interview and she got appointment as a lower division clerk in the revenue department. Shruti joined the government service in the revenue department at the civil station of Kottayam municipality. Though there was no more need to continue as a maid since her daughter is an earning member, Resmi continued to serve the doctors' family. It was mentally difficult for her to leave her mam and sir. She has become a family member and for the doctors also it was unimaginable to live without her.

Meanwhile the doctors' daughter Twinkle passed her MBBS and got an appointment as a junior doctor in the general hospital at Kottayam. Happy days of the doctors' family and that of Resmi flowed smoothly to months and years.

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Both Twinkle and Shruti have entered into the age of 25. In an evening when the doctor family was taking the dinner Dr. Radha initiated a talk about Twinkle's marriage:

“Dear daughter, you are now 25 and it is time that you get married.”

“Mama, let me remain single for some more time and enjoy life.”

“Twinkle, you won't lose any freedom or enjoyment even if you are married to some good guy. We shall search for such a husband who will make your life happier than the present.” Dr. Prakash suggested.

“Being a doctor you know the physiological advantage of getting married and bearing earlier than late. We shall search for a suitable junior doctor.” Radha added.

“Ok mama, it is left to you. But there is one condition. Only if the proposer qualifies my concepts of a husband I will give the consent.” Twinkle replied.

“No doubt, Twinkle, your choice is our choice. We will give your details to the matrimonial agency and only if you are hundred percent satisfied with the proposal we will fix the marriage.” Prakash told.

The next morning when Resmi came for the work Radha spoke to her about the plan of Twinkle’s marriage.

“Resmi, what about the marriage of your daughter, Shruti? She is of the same age of Twinkle. She is now employed and you can find a proper bridegroom for her.” Radha added.

“True mam, she is of marriageable age. But the problem is the money needed for the wedding. Even though dowry shall not be given, she should have minimum gold ornaments. In addition we should give some pocket money. With whatever Shruti could earn and taking a loan from the bank we have renovated our house. The old thatched house is made a concrete roofed one now.” Resmi replied.

Meanwhile Dr. Prakash appeared there in the kitchen to have a tea.

“Prakash, why don’t we think of Shruti’s marriage along with Twinkle’s? They both are of same age. I have been talking of Shruti’s marriage to Resmi. The problem is that Resmi has no money to meet the wedding expense. Shall we help her?” Radha asked.

“Why not? Shruti is our own daughter like Twinkle. Resmi, try to find out a suitable bridegroom for Shruti. We are seeking one for Twinkle. We shall have both their wedding on the same day at Sree Krishna temple and the reception thereafter in the wedding hall of the temple itself.” Prakash said.

Resmi was overwhelmed with happiness of hearing this offer and she started shedding tears of joy. “I have no words to express my gratitude to you dear sir and mam. In return I can only pray for you. God will no doubt reward you for the magnanimity and compassion shown to us.” Resmi replied.

After a month of search through matrimonial agency, a junior doctor working in the medical college at Thiruvananthapuram was chosen as bridegroom for Twinkle. Similarly Resmi could find a boy working as a school teacher in a government school at Kottayam as the bridegroom of Shruti. Resmi was given five lakh rupees by the doctors for buying gold ornaments for Shruti. The wedding of Twinkle and Shruti was fixed on 10<sup>th</sup> May at Sree Krishna Temple at Kottayam. Around six hundred friends, colleagues and relatives were invited by the doctors’ family and nearly two hundred guests were invited from Resmi’s relatives and neighbours as well as the colleagues of Shruti. Between 9.30 am and 10.30 am the pujari of the temple made the couples united through the exchange of rings and *thalikettu* (bridegroom tying the *thali* chord around the neck of the bride). There was sudden change in the weather. It started drizzling and gentle breeze blessed the couples to the accompaniment of chirps of birds around the temple. Thus the Nature too was excited at the sublime love exhibited through the weddings. After the wedding ceremony, as per the Hindu rites, dinner was served to the guests. It was very simple meal—rice and curries, purely vegetarian. Felicitating the couples on the stage many talked, among whom were dignitaries like the principals of the medical colleges, district collector and municipal chairman. All of them praised the magnanimity of the minds of Dr. Prakash and Dr. Radha. They emphasised that these doctors are role models to all employers and they have shown through their life how a maid and her family should be loved and treated. In a world where servants are treated like slaves these doctors are messiahs sent by God.